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**INTO THE LAND OF NOD**

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BLINKERS  
MRS. POMEROY'S REPUTATION  
JUBILEE DRAX (WITH WALTER HACKETT)  
PLUS FOURS (WITH HAROLD SIMPSON)

# INTO THE LAND OF NOD

by

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

“In the Land of Nod, on the east of Eden.”

GENESIS IV. 16.

SECOND IMPRESSION

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers) LTD.  
34-36 Paternoster Row, London, E.C. 4

TO THE MEMORY OF  
“MITCHIE”

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## FOREWORD

I TAKE it that every writer of fiction, if he be fairly well known, receives (often from strangers) suggestions for novels and short stories ; and now and again he may be given a workable plot with beginning, middle and end. I was told by (I think) the late Mr. A. P. Watt that Wilkie Collins once offered one hundred pounds for any plot in tabloid form which he could use. Many plots were submitted ; not one was taken.

About twenty years ago—certainly before the War—I was much interested in a letter from a gentleman living in our West Country. Unhappily that letter was mislaid or destroyed and with it went the writer's name and address. He sent me a "true" story as a free gift. Certain "facts"—so he pointed out—had "happened" about the time of the Crimean War. The story, such as it was (briefly outlined upon two or three sheets of notepaper), appealed to me ; but I had on hand other engrossing work, and the theme, concerning itself with an inherited "taint," was on the improbable side. Accordingly I wrote to my correspondent to thank him, adding that at the moment I couldn't adopt or adapt his story and suggesting that he might wish to send it to some other writer. In reply he hoped that I would do it "some day" ; and he proposed to leave it with me indefinitely with this condition attached : if I did use it, the story must be entitled : "Into the Land of Nod."

His letters, I repeat, were pigeon-holed, and probably destroyed during a move. But I remembered the story because it was so incredible. It amused me to tell it to a few friends, and finally I told it to a doctor, who said that he for his part believed it to be true. Perhaps, from that moment, either consciously or subconsciously, I began to

## FOREWORD

think of it as possible material for a novel. About four years ago I told it once more to one of Mr. Punch's learned clerks, whose judgment I could trust. With no uncertain voice he urged me to "get to work" on it—which forthwith I did. Still, it occurred to me that the story might have been given to another; so I took pains to find out if any novel had been published within the last twenty years dealing with similar facts. No such novel has been published. If my kind correspondent is alive, and if he should read these lines, I hope that he will write to me. Apart from the strange "happenings" which he vouched for, I have presented another theme, the upbringing of a delicate boy by two devoted women. There was no suggestion of that in the original story; but the dramatic scene at the end of the book where a dream comes true in a courtyard in France is substantially what was sent to me. Every line of the text is mine. Had I *imagined* what is not mine, I much doubt whether I should have attempted to set it down in print simply because the improbable is not fish to my net. I can affirm honestly that I was lured to write this book because a doctor assured me that he could cite a somewhat similar case.

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL.

WIDCOMBE MANOR,  
BATH.

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Book I

SEED-TIME

While earth remaineth seed-time and harvest shall not cease.

GENESIS VIII. 22.



## CHAPTER I

### PROLOGUE

#### I

EVEN her unfriends—she had no enemies—admitted that Mary Graves was a sensible woman. Being so sensible, she was in no hurry to “get” married, that queer colloquial phrase, which implies purpose and the ardour of the chase. It was admitted too that Mary had to “mother” her father, Rodney Graves, who had married when he was past sixty a young lady who said “shush-h-h” whenever the great man opened his mouth. Presumably Mrs. Graves inspired in her daughter, an only child, the same spirit of devotion. Mary was barely twelve when her mother died of *angina pectoris*. At the last, she whispered : “ You will take care of Daddy, darling, because everybody knows that he can’t take care of himself.” This was true, but it must have astounded Mary. However, she pledged herself to do what she could. Graves lived to be a very old man, but he never recovered from the death of his wife. Probably to-day nobody reads or remembers a line of his writings. As a very old dog, he could (and did) admit that he had had his day. As an able critic much of his best work was published unsigned ; as a painstaking novelist he achieved a measure of fame and fortune ; but he could never overcome an odd mental indolence ; critical faculties impinged detrimentally upon creative ability. . . . Physically he had never been robust. . . . He remained a “guarded flame” till the flame flickered out. She was then five-and-twenty, and found herself passing rich with eight hundred a year. . . .

She had, meanwhile, refused to marry several men desperately keen to marry her. One or two were indiscreet

enough to hint that love was rooted in pity for an old man's too willing slave. If this was true she could retort (but she didn't) that she was also the old man's darling, a compensating privilege.

To the surprise of her small world Mary married a soldier, Michael Lynn, who could write P.S.C. after his name, and was devoted to the profession of arms. Here again tongues wagged in Lynn's regiment and elsewhere because he was regarded as an encrusted bachelor set in ways that were not women's ways. Women had angled for him in vain. He had independent means ; he was austere handsone, a commanding presence, kind and courteous to all women. They simply couldn't comprehend his enforced celibacy. Intuition, nothing else, told them that there must be some secret reason ; and intuition happened to be right.

Before he proposed marriage, Lynn told Mary a disagreeable fact about himself. In the 'nineties men and women were struggling hard to break down the barrier between the sexes. Nevertheless Victorian reticences still flourished. There were popular novels of inordinate length in which the love interest was sustained till the last page, merely because the hero or heroine kept inviolate some absurd secret that would have smoothed their path to the altar (and ended the story incidentally), if it had been revealed, as it should have been, about the third chapter.

Lynn told his secret to Mary in her drawing-room in Kensington Square. It had been her father's room, and here he had received and entertained so many of the famous men of the day. His desk remained much as it was when Graves wrote at it. His books lined the walls. Mary read the books, but refused to write for publication, although urged to do so by her father's friends. Probably the critical faculty was too strong in her. Graves criticised everything and everybody except himself. Mary was critical of herself and also of critics. She distrusted their judgments. It amused her to sit on the fence, when sharp-shooters on each side were slinging barbed arrows at each other. There

was a family joke, started by Graves : "Mary knows." Mary, indeed, had to know everything forgotten by Graves. She became a dictionary of quotations, having an amazing memory. From the time she was fifteen, she did her father's "spade-work." She liked doing it, because such intermittent labours did not interfere with her work of "running" the house and adjusting ends and means. Possibly, she grasped, even as a child, the essential fact that what Graves did was all-absorbing. He lived placidly in the land of his dreams ; she was constrained to cope with servants, tradesmen, relations—all and sundry who were likely to imperil her father's peace of mind and body. When he died this habit of ministration was too deeply engrained to be uprooted.

Lynn attracted her at sight. He seemed to be that rare animal—an unselfish man. He was popular with brother officers and men, because he never shirked regimental duties and took cheerfully upon himself duties shirked by others. Also, he happened to be shy. None of Graves' friends were shy. As has been said, Lynn's fine qualities showed in his face. Mary thought it a beautiful face ; and she had been trained to acclaim beauty wherever she might find it. She failed to find it in her own features ; her face, whatever else it might be, was not her fortune. She had beautiful eyes, and a firm, generously modelled mouth. The eyes were deeply set, glowing, a translucent umber, and shaded by short, thick lashes. Her father spoke of them as "star-lit" and "velvety." He wrote a sonnet about them, which Mary read blushingly and incredulously. . . . She could not see that her eyes deserved these adjectives. They dwelt sorrowfully upon other features which had to be labelled "plain."

She met Lynn first at the Royal Academy, and, together, they looked at the pictures and liked the same pictures, ever a bond of union. It is significant that they paid but scant attention to the pictures "of the year" which attracted the crowd. Lynn said frankly that the work of the strivers rather than the thrivers appealed to him ; he wanted to "spot" the coming man, to find something, anything,

that differentiated the artist from the artisan. Into this quest Mary entered with enthusiasm.

After this they met again and again, but their relations remained impersonal. Lynn never spoke of himself ; Mary, slightly piqued, observed similar reserves.

Finally the ice was broken.

## II

He called at tea-time, and remained after other visitors had gone. Then he said abruptly :

“ I want to tell you something about myself.”

“ Do.”

“ I came into this world an idiot.”

For the moment, she failed to grasp what he meant ; he soon enlightened her, and if her critical faculties were in abeyance she was able without effort to appreciate the delicacy and skill with which he handled lamentable facts.

“ Yes ; I am not aware that there is any taint in my family on either side. I have discussed my—my affliction with a famous alienist. I'll tell you what he said presently. My mother was very unhappy before I was born ; it is necessary to emphasise that ; but her unhappiness had nothing to do with my father. She told me that at the time he was exceptionally patient and tender with her. Pre-natal influence may have affected me. For the first seven years my mind refused to function ; and, as sometimes happens, my body was not affected. I looked a strong healthy child. I made dreadful inarticulate noises ; so far as I know everybody regarded me as incurably idiotic, a *crétin*. After seven years, my mother was the first to notice a slight change. At seven I began to develop mentally, and I began where a baby of eighteen months, or less, begins. When I was twelve, you, if you had known me, would have said that I was a normal boy, rather backward for my age. Meantime my father died. My mother devoted herself to me. She lived to see me pass into and out of Sandhurst. In an odd sort of way, I have always felt that she died because her work was done. I had ceased to be dependent on her. It

is a great grief to me, Miss Graves, that I never expressed to her my tremendous sense of obligation."

" If you felt it, she knew it."

" I hope so. Youth takes too much for granted; unselfishness breeds selfishness. What I owe to her must be paid to others."

Mary was unable to speak. This simple recital left so much unsaid with which her imagination could deal that she was profoundly moved. Indeed she was too moved to make this startling revelation personal to herself. She didn't ask: " Why has he told me this? " That question would crop up later. He continued in the same quiet voice:

" For many years I kept my secret; it concerned nobody except myself. Still, deep down, it rankled. The other day I went to my alienist, at the top of his profession. These fellows are cautious. I didn't get much out of him. He spoke of my case as one of arrested development. He admitted that there might be a taint. The bigger the man, as a rule, the more modest is he. My fellow said candidly: ' We don't know; none of us knows. We grope. . . .' He vetted me, Miss Graves; he passed me as perfectly sane and sound—"

" I am sure that you are, Major Lynn."

" He dwelt upon the pre-natal influence. My mother was terribly unhappy, because a dear friend of hers, no relation, became insane immediately after marriage. There was a lawsuit about it, because the husband demanded a divorce on the plea that she had been insane before marriage, which was indignantly repudiated by the lady's mother. My mother was called as a witness for the defence. That might, or might not, have affected me."

" It is reasonable to assume that it did."

" Yes, but it remains an assumption. Then I asked my man a question. Did he think I was unfit to marry? "

He paused; and immediately Mary's question obtruded itself: " Has he told me this because he wishes to marry me? "

She remained calm outwardly, ravaged within. What

she might have said, a few simple words of sympathy, were denied expression because the issue had become so poignantly intimate. She quivered with nervousness, as she awaited the verdict.

"He told me that in his considered opinion I might marry. Of the risks incidental to all marriages he had something to say. Holy matrimony is a most unholy gamble. You know that ; and so do I. The clash of conflicting temperaments, tastes, and predilections is a theme upon which he spoke convincingly, but at the end he paid me a compliment which I hardly like to repeat."

"You must repeat it to me."

"He said that he would give his daughter to me."

"Oh-h-h ! "

"But you see, he hasn't a daughter."

Lynn smiled ironically. Shortly afterwards he went away.

### III

Three weeks later they were engaged to be married. During a brief engagement, nobody hinted to Mary that there was a taint in her future husband. Apparently nobody knew. Lynn told her that his mother and father had gone abroad, buried themselves in some obscure French village. He used an expression not familiar to her : "They went into the Land of Nod."

"The Land of Nod ? "

He explained. Nod signifies in the Hebrew—exile. Cain went out of "the presence of the Lord" into the Land of Nod ; and David, when speaking of his own unsettled life, says in one of the Psalms : "Thou tellest my wanderings." The Land of Nod into which the Psalmist strayed may have been the parched and barren deserts of Arabia Petræa. But, of course, Mary understood that the Land of Nod to the Lynns meant a self-imposed exile from home and friends, a desire, almost amounting to an obsession, to hide their unhappy secret, a desire which became fulfilment. *Nobody knew.*

For two happy years after marriage Mary followed the

flag of Lynn's regiment. It was his ambition to command that regiment ; he had the pipeclay in his marrow. Of these two years there is little to record except this : Mary, as the wife of a keen soldier, had to step, so to speak, out of the Kensington house, with all its literary associations, on to a barrack square. She found herself intimately associated with ladies, wives of other officers, who talked about polo and had never heard of Pater, who preferred tennis, as a theme of never-failing interest, to Tennyson. A less sensible woman might have protested, but Mary was amused at the predominance assigned to field-sports and games. She quoted the remark of a waggish highbrow : "England is a little island, separated from the rest of the world by an immense gulf called 'cricket'." Being adaptable, Mary played up and played the game, metaphorically, in the right spirit. She could do this because she knew that she had married the right man.

In 1899, a tiny cloud rose in the south. It was still a cloudlet, when Lynn said to his wife :

"We are on the eve of war."

"You mean we shall have to fight the Boers ? "

"I'm certain of it."

"But it will be only a little war, a punitive expedition ? "

"Because some big men think so, it will not be so. England always underrates her enemies. History will repeat itself. We shall send out insufficient troops."

In October, war was declared.

Immediately Mary had to dissemble her feelings. She believed that a gigantic blunder had been made in the sacred name of the British Empire. She was not pro-Boer, but instinctively she shrank from the conviction that a world-power was about to attack and destroy a tiny nation of Dutchmen. She didn't dare to say so, even to her husband, but being her father's daughter, she shared his views about all wars. Graves had been a Pacifist, much too outspoken for his generation. He had always talked of war as a calamity alike for winner and loser ; he contended that behind all wars—and causing them—lurked greed, ambition, and recklessness.

Before Christmas Lynn volunteered for active service. His services as a Staff Officer were needed, whether his regiment went to the front or not. At the moment the regiment was not on the roster. To Mary, Lynn said quietly :

“ I’m wanted out there.”

“ If you *must* go, can I go with you ? ”

“ We should see nothing of each other. Probably you would have to stay in or near Capetown.”

“ I shouldn’t mind that.”

“ Ask your doctor what he thinks.”

The doctor, proof against all beguilements, was emphatic that Mary ought to remain in England. She was expecting a baby in six months’ time. . . . No risks should be taken. . . .

#### IV

On the eve of sailing for South Africa, Lynn spoke once more of the first years of his life. It must be remembered that he was speaking to a woman of twenty-seven, whom he knew to be courageous, practical, and sensible. Nevertheless all men are likely to make mistakes in their dealings with women, however good their intentions may be. Mary knew that he spoke because he believed that it was his duty to speak, and that the subject was extremely distasteful to him. He held her firm, capable hand in his, and pressed it reassuringly :

“ You know, Mary, how I hoped to be with you when your time comes ? ”

“ Yes ; yes—if I didn’t know that, if such knowledge wasn’t a precious possession, I could hardly wish you God-speed.”

“ If anything happens, I have left everything to you.”

“ Don’t speak of that.”

“ But I must. What I have done is proof of my absolute confidence in you.”

“ No such proof is needed.”

“ Mary, dear, if—if the child should be as I was——”

"Yes——?"

"You would not despair; you would remember that I outgrew that terrible infirmity?"

"I swear to you that I should. I suppose you had to say this; and now I say to you that whatever happens I shall not despair. If you have ever been sorry that you told me, if you feel that I, even as your mother, might be affected by knowing the truth, believe that I am glad, glad because if my child was so afflicted I should have faith and courage. If you hadn't told me, if alone without you my child had been born as you were, I might indeed have despaired."

"You are a brave woman. May you bring into the world a son as brave as yourself."

## v

Mary saw him "off" at Southampton. As the great trooper put to sea with flags a-flying and the band playing, Lynn stood a little apart, so that she could see him to the last. He was her "man." He might be going out of her life. If it was destined to be so, she would carry to her grave this memory of him—tall, erect, a smile upon his lips, and in his eyes a haunting anxiety. . . .

As tears blurred the last glimpse of him, a woman beside her fainted. Mary had to attend to her, a Judy O'Grady, a sister "under the skin," and in the same condition. This grief-stricken creature was positive that she would never see her Tom again. He was only a "Tommy" to be mowed down like grass: officers and gentlemen had a better chance. Mary sat beside her in a third-class carriage and tried to comfort her, thinking how inadequate human speech was even to those who had been trained to use it. Really what people thought mattered, not what they said, particularly in emotional moments. This woman, however, dared to say what she thought, casting all reserves to the void. If her Tom didn't get killed by the Boers, who were all "dead" shots, he might take up with another woman

and settle down in a new country where a man could have as many wives as he pleased. . . . To combat this point of view engrossed Mary's wits during the journey between Southampton and London. The strangely assorted pair parted company at Waterloo station. Tommy's wife, fortunately, was returning to her own mother and a family of brothers and sisters ; the mother supported herself by "taking in" washing ; Mrs. Tommy could "earn her keep," and thanked "Gawd" that she would be "up an' doin'" till her time came. . . .

Mary returned to the house in Kensington Square.

Many friends rallied round her, but she had no relations that counted ; nor had Lynn. To distract her mind, she undertook, tentatively, the task of compiling some sort of an anthology of fugitive verse written by Graves. A famous publisher whom she consulted pricked up his ears when Mary spoke of her father's letters. There were neatly docketed piles of these untouched since his death, and among them—*plums*. Would Mrs. Lynn collect the plums and put them on top of the pottle ? Mary hesitated ; the publisher insisted. The prose of well-known contemporaries would unquestionably "sell" verse that could hardly be described as poetry. Finally, Mary promised to "try." For reasons best known to herself she had no stomach for this enterprise. Possibly she knew that Graves was a transmitter of light, not a source of it. His glory, such as it was, came from his association with others ; he had reflected faithfully enough the reflections of others ; he had worn a halo that didn't quite fit him. . . .

Her first considered move was to eye with misgiving the rows of diaries, small octavos, locked and leather-bound. It had amused Graves to keep a diary, but he had often said, with a sly smile at himself, that he was no Greville. Mary knew that he hated gossip and scandal.

The diaries, as she had expected, chronicled very small beer indeed. Graves had jotted down the titles of books which he read omnivorously with here and there amusing comments concerning them ; he set down his outgoings and incomings, the names of persons whom he met at

dinner and often what he ate at dinner, particularly if it disagreed with him afterwards. "Can't wade through all this," thought Mary; "perhaps the letters will be more interesting."

She abandoned the diaries for the moment, and opened a tin box labelled "Letters from my Mother."

These were charming, lavender-scented, and yet peppered and salted. Mary had been born after her grandmother's death, but Graves always spoke of his mother as a woman of parts, affirming that his intelligence came from the distaff side.

Reading these lengthy epistles with real pleasure and pride, Mary was surprised to find that the mother never mentioned marriage to her son. Obviously the two were on the most intimate terms. Mary patiently awaited the natural question: "Have you seen anybody you like better than yourself?" Soon she began to wonder if Graves had ever met any person whom he liked better than himself. There was no allusion to the potential "She," ~~who might have been her mother much earlier in the century. She found another tin box which held her father's letters to his mother.~~ It was interesting to collate the letters. And in the letters of the son, for many years after he left Oxford, young women were hardly mentioned. Why? Did he live then in the land of his dreams? Was he more intimately concerned with the creatures of his imagination than with the flesh-and-blood people whom he met every day? Collating the letters, date for date, Mary realised what a source of inspiration the mother had been. . . .

The reason governing these singular abstentions cropped up unexpectedly. When he was past thirty Graves, apparently, had fallen desperately in love for the first time with a young lady of quality. She belonged to an ancient family. But the mother had written peremptorily: "You can't marry *her*." The six letters that followed—three from Graves and three from his mother—were illuminating. In both families lurked a taint of insanity. Evidently the mother's arguments against this particular marriage prevailed. The young lady's name dropped out of the corres-

pondence, although for a year at least there were veiled allusions to her. During this year Graves published a novel which Mary accepted as an *apologia* for his celibacy. She re-read it as a *roman à clef*. The critics of that day acclaimed it as his best work, which no doubt it was ; because fact makes fiction convincing. Graves had not proposed to the young lady, and in his novel, cleverly, delicately and charmingly, he had presented his case against marriage. This book established the author's reputation ; it passed through several editions, but towards the close of his life Graves never spoke of it to his daughter. Till she re-read it, she had not the remotest idea that the story was so intimately personal. . . .

She laid it aside, actually locked it up, with an odd feeling of apprehension. *Her father had married.* He had changed his mind upon a matter of supreme importance. But she remembered how whimsically and convincingly he talked about mental revaluations and readjustments, contending that any honest change of opinion indicated intelligence and experience.—Flags, with rarest exceptions, should never be nailed to the mast !

## VI

Being a true daughter of Eve, Mary set herself the task of discovering what taint lurked in Graves' blood. She went back to the diaries. Intuitively she made sure that Graves, when writing his novel, had set down in his diary something that he might not choose to print in his book. In that, with consummate art, he had "covered his tracks." No critic had guessed that the story was convincing simply because it was autobiographical. Rather the contrary. The reviewers, to a man, hailed in Graves the one great quality denied to him by his fairy godmother—imagination. Mary, at long last, could understand why this first novel had been the best of many, a promise that never ripened.

She found what she expected to find. In the young lady's family there had been marked insanity, two or three

cases ; in the Graves family only one, an idiotic aunt, who was euphemistically described as "wanting." If there were "others," they were not mentioned. Apparently Graves, like Lynn, had consulted some authority, who spoke in no uncertain terms of the double risk. Apparently he considered the risk to be negligible if Graves married some other healthy young woman. Against this opinion Graves had scribbled in pencil : "*Aut Lesbia, aut nulla.*" For several weeks after this there were no entries. Then they began again, as before, a perfunctory chronicle of everyday doings. . . .

Mary tried desperately to dismiss from her mind all thoughts which might affect her and her unborn child. She would have succeeded in doing this had Lynn been with her. But she was alone, and devoting time and energies to her father's memory.

Inevitably, although she was trying to present Graves as a Man of Letters, avoiding wherever possible any comment, she had to consider him from a new point of view. Many of his friends did regard him affectionately as an amiable eccentric. To them he appeared "queer" in his ways. Mary, even as a child, had thought him delightfully unlike many fathers. Now, poring over his papers, attempting to read them with critical detachment, it seemed certain that he was more than an "oddity." Two of his correspondents addressed him as "Peter Piper." Another correspondent began her letters : "Beloved Puck." Everything that was Peter Piperish and Pucklike in him rushed into Mary's mind. He had been her playmate when she was a child, meeting her upon equal terms. How she had adored him for that——!

Subconsciously, she portrayed him as a playmate. To her amazement, when she sent her opening chapters to her publisher (at his request), she received a warm letter of congratulation and encouragement. In a pleasant interview he expressed his satisfaction with what she had done.

" You are building better than you know," he said.

" In what way ? "

" Not too easy a question to answer, Mrs. Lynn. Good

biographies are scarce. This work of yours has the outstanding merit of portraiture. You make us see your father. How do you do it?"

"Really I—I don't know."

"Anyway you have inherited his happy gift of expression."

"You believe that all that is passed on like—like heir-looms?"

"Who doesn't? It may skip a generation; it may be there and not come out. We are all composite photographs of our forbears."

"Would you say that a blemish was more likely to be inherited than some beautiful feature?"

"The Hapsburg lip persists."

"Yes."

The publisher laughed and changed the subject.

## VII

Meanwhile, Lynn was doing good, unobtrusive work as a Staff Officer. The letters that he wrote to Mary ought to have been taken with a grain of salt, but they had their intended effect. He assured her that he was, comparatively speaking, out of the danger zone. The Colonel of his regiment, calling in Kensington Square, confirmed this reassuring news, describing Lynn's activities and enforced passivities. Lynn happened to be an organiser. His Chief predicted that he would be kept at his desk brandishing the pen, not the sword.

"We can't spare fellows like him, Mrs. Lynn."

He looked at her keenly. She wondered whether Lynn's pen had inspired this last remark.

"You aren't too anxious about him, are you?"

"N-no."

"A dubious 'no.' Well, you can take it from me that he'll return to you trailing clouds of glory. Then, and probably not till then, he'll reap his reward."

"From me?" she smiled.

"From a grateful country. The War Office doesn't overlook the 'indispensables'."

"It is pleasant to hear you call him that."

After the Colonel had taken his leave, she sat alone in her father's room, thinking of that word "indispensable." Lynn was indispensable to her happiness. Without him the world would be drab and dreary. Nevertheless, so often these very men, faithful alike in big things and small, towers of strength to all who needed them and their services, were mysteriously taken; whereas others, the lame, the halt and the blind, lingered on and on. . . .

Three weeks later the Colonel called again. One glance at his troubled face was enough.

An "indispensable" had been taken.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHILD

#### I

COURAGE is accorded to him who leaps before he looks, who physically rather than mentally is immune from fear. Mary Lynn, a timid horsewoman, had none of that courage. Addison says somewhere that courage arising from a sense of duty acts always in a uniform manner. Mary had a sense of duty and the courage that glorifies it. She was stunned by shock, but, automatically, she "carried on" to the amazement and admiration of her friends, confronting present and future calmly, resignedly, and (outwardly at any rate) with fortitude. What she suppressed—all the agonies of bereavement, all the apprehensions that beset her—she alone knew. The fact that such poignant emotions were suppressed must have affected her profoundly.

Within a few days of Lynn's death—he had been shot through the head and died instantly—she received a sealed letter from his solicitors :

" When you read this, my darling, I shall be dead. I have never believed in premonitions, but I felt strongly, soon after our marriage, that our happiness was too great to endure on this plane. You have been a wonderful wife ; and nothing has come between us, none of the little dislocations and petty jealousies which make the first years of marriage difficult and uneasy. We have both realised, I think, how dependent each was on the other, because our trust in each other grew steadily from the first. *That remains.* I carry to the Other Side your love for me and my love for you. I believe in a future life ; so do you.

May that belief sustain you, as it has sustained and fortified me. . . .

" If our child should be a son, I would have you remember this : if there is any good in me I owe it to my mother. Her unselfish devotion when I needed so tremendously her constant care may have seemed to her for seven years to be wasted. It bore fruit later, as you know. How she did it, I can't tell you, but her grip on me never relaxed till she died. The ordinary English boy goes to school too soon ; at school, being a little monkey, he apes other boys and is cut to their pattern, losing so often all intimate touch with his mother. You will not make that mistake. Nor will you go to the other extreme and keep him in cotton-wool, an unwilling prisoner tied to your apron strings. You will have to 'father' him. . . .

" Encourage him to find his own path, the right path for him, even if it looks like the wrong path to you. I have loved my work. . . .

" *Ave et vale*, my beloved Mary."

She read and re-read the letter till every word was impressed indelibly upon her memory ; then she put it away, thinking : " I will show it to *him* when he is old enough to understand what manner of man his father was."

Other letters poured in upon her, a stream, a spate, of condolence and panegyric. Several, which she read through blinding tears, were from his men whom he had served so faithfully. He lay in a soldier's grave upon the veldt, but these were his memorial, his monument. She put them away reverentially. No man can fathom one deep in every decent woman's heart ; possibly few women can do so because the many marry in haste, thinking only of the passing moment. To the few it must be an abiding benediction to reflect that they have chosen the right father for their children, that—so far as their individual choice is concerned—they have insured the unborn against disabilities incalculably overwhelming. Upon the letters that Mary put away, she might have written : " Death has not taken from my child the right father."

## II

Under the terms of Lynn's will, Mary found herself sole beneficiary and executrix. With the exception of a few legacies to friends, everything was left unreservedly to her. Practically what her father had bequeathed was doubled. She had an income of about £1600 a year, and the house in Kensington Square. . . .

Meanwhile she distracted her mind by working steadily at the Graves book, no longer an anthology, but shaping itself, almost without volition on her part, into a biography. Her publisher had been too much for her, but, wisely, he entreated her to make haste slowly. He, of course, was fully aware of Mary's talent, truly a gift, for selection. The book would be read as a study of a temperament, a dry-point etching of a lovable oddity, a proof, in its way, *before* letters, because Mary had served no cut-and-dried apprenticeship to letters. She would accomplish her task in her own way and at her own time. Any excess of speed would invite disaster.

Hitherto, certainly up to the time of her father's death, Mary had made no intimate friendships with girls of her own age. She couldn't account for this ; it just happened to be so. Many of Graves' friends were her friends, men much younger than he. He liked to draw young men about him, and spoke of them, chucklingly, as rejuvenating ; he was ever kind to the novices if he detected any genuine talent. Often he amused himself and Mary by reading aloud manuscripts submitted to him which he treated with whimsical tenderness, hating to discourage ardent youth, saying "Thank God, the poor fellow can't read this as I do. If he did, he'd burn it." Some of these poor fellows made love to Mary ; and then Graves would pinch her cheek, and make deprecating noises : "Tch—tch ! Dear—dear ! Take it from me, Mollie, that a wise little woman doesn't marry literary gents ; they are too absorbed in themselves. I *know*, my little cabbage." At the time Mary thought that what her father didn't know about men was not worth knowing ; he seldom talked about women.

He was at his best when he talked about books. When girls of her own age asked Mary if she had been to school, she replied demurely : " Yes, in my father's library," an answer which silenced without satisfying curiosity. If it provoked the comment : " I say, you must know a lot," Mr. Graves' daughter would reply : " I do know how little I know."

Before her husband's death, she had made acquaintance with a woman of her own age ; friendship soon followed. The lady was in straitened circumstances, a widow with two children. The husband, after heavy losses on the Stock Exchange, had been seen to fling himself in front of an express train. That was the end of everything mundane for him, and, strangely enough, the beginning of a new and interesting life for his widow, accustomed till then to every luxury. Felicia Norman started a hat-shop in Sloane Street, and made a small success of it, because she peremptorily refused to give credit. Smart hats had to be paid for "on the nail." Fashionable friends protested, but " value received " triumphed. The hats were undeniably smart—and cheap.

Mrs. Norman was smart as her hats. Mary nearly gasped when she learned the lady's Christian name, but it happened to be singularly appropriate. She was the happiest creature. Before friendship was established between two women outwardly so different, Mary was told, with entire frankness, that the late Mr. Norman had been a very indifferent husband. A disagreeable subject was left at that, but Mrs. Norman—and this indeed drew the two together—appeared to be set resolutely in the determination to eliminate, if she could, bad qualities which might, presumably, be inherited by the children.

" It's so awful to think that the innocents are half his."

The innocents, a boy and a girl, were an engaging couple, too young to miss the luxuries of their earliest years. Mrs. Norman continued :

" I haven't time to think about unhappy yesterdays. To-morrow is an engrossing problem. To-day takes care

of itself. I had to sell my diamonds and pearls. I got far more than they were worth."

"How did you manage that?"

"It was managed by a man on the Stock Exchange. My things were raffled. Delightfully illegal, you know, but a real grant in aid. That started the hat shop. Then the men sent their wives to buy my hats. I have a flair for hats and *chiffons*—I may launch into them later. It's still a struggle, but my head is above water. All weekly bills settled promptly."

She laughed gaily.

"I must know this plucky creature," thought Mary.  
"What a pick-me-up!"

Confidence begets confidence. Within a week or so Mary found herself on curiously intimate terms with a woman generally regarded as a butterfly. She couldn't understand at first why this particular butterfly settled upon her, till Felicia gave an adequate reason.

"I get a lot from you."

"What do you get?"

"Some of your honey. You are sweetly sensible. My kids have found that out. I trust their instincts. You see I'm a parasite; I attach myself to people who can help me. You are so independent. I hope we shall be friends."

"I have never had a woman friend."

"How exciting—if you begin with me. Why not? Do."

Thus they glided into friendship, which might have been ephemeral had it not been for the innocents. Mary always thought of them as that. Felicia's days were spent in the hat-shop. The innocents remained in the charge of an excellent nurse, who (another tribute to Felicia) had stuck to her mistress through thick and thin, but she couldn't take a mother's place. Insensibly Mary slipped into that. She visited the children and they visited her, provoking maternal solicitudes. Afterwards Mary said: "I was a mother long before my child was born." She was quicker than their own mother to detect in them tiny traits of character, straws indicating the mighty current of heredity.

The boy lorded it over his sister. Obviously seeds of selfishness and recklessness lay in him. The girl had a temper. Nevertheless, being happy sprites, they twined themselves round Mary's heart, lightening and brightening it with their artless prattle. Assuredly the coming event was not shadowed by them, but glowingly illuminated. To her amusement, the nurse made sure that it would be a girl.

"Why do you think so?" asked Mary.

"Because I hope so. You've had trouble enough. God Almighty owes you something. If it's a boy he'll be off to school afore you know where you are. But, with any luck, you'll keep the girl for a round score of years. And you can make her just like yourself."

"But I want a boy, Mrs. Dingle."

"I dessay; we women ask for trouble—and get it."

Mrs. Dingle, assuming brevet rank, was a spinster, who held men in no high esteem. She echoed Barrie's "better dead" when she spoke of her late master.

"He led me an awful life—"

"Led you?"

"Why, yes, M'm. It kept me awake nights to see how he treated my young lady, who was mine long before he came round the corner."

"If Mrs. Norman had died and he had lived——!"

"That don't bear thinking of, M'm. It does look as if the Lord kept his eye on the little ones. Well, well, sheep or goats we all have to go when our turn comes."

### III

As her time drew near, Mary was tempted to speak to her doctor about the taint in both families. But she knew that he would dissemble with her, make light of it, as in duty bound, and soothe her with platitudes which she abhorred. She would be enjoined not to borrow trouble, a good but time-worn phrase that. If you borrowed trouble, you had to pay compound interest on trouble, not easy to compute, when Nature had the casting up of accounts. . . .

Her child would be born in the bed where she, so many years ago, had opened her eyes upon this amazing world. In the chair where she sat alone, her mother must have sat. Did she want a boy? Was she cruelly disappointed when a girl was placed in her arms? Probably not.

*If the child died—?*

Had she done what she could to insure deliverance of a healthy baby? Yes—with the one cruel exception of the tormenting fears about the taint. Her thoughts refused to be controlled on that terrible subject. Lynn, had he lived, could not have exorcised them; but Lynn, had he been able to remain with her, would have kept her mind engrossed with other matters. Why had he been taken when she needed him so sorely?

She wondered how her father had felt just before her own birth. He had his work, which meant so much to him. That after all was the colossal difference between men and women at such a time as this. Few indeed, of either sex, could estimate the weight of each other's burdens. There had been moments when Mary failed to understand what Lynn's work as a regimental officer imposed on him. He "fussed" about trifles, which were not trifles when you came to analyse them. His duty had to rank before her. In the same sense a mother's duty to her unborn child was paramount. Otherwise she would have gone with her man to South Africa. . . .

She might join Lynn on the Other Side and take her baby with her.

What an easy solution of a difficult problem! How did she feel about that? Is it possible, save on the wings of imagination, to make these spiritual excursions, to view oneself as a disembodied spirit relieved of the galling restrictions of the flesh? She knew, however, that life was still dear to her, because she was the custodian of the life within her. If it was a boy, Lynn would come back to her; he would live again in his son, the eternal resurrection of the dead in the quickening atom.

She knelt down to entreat God to make her son like his father.

## IV

When it was all over, as she lay exhausted, hardly conscious of any vitality left, the doctor's voice floated to her :

" It's a big beautiful boy, Mrs. Lynn. You shall see him presently."

She closed her eyes and fell into a heavenly sleep.

When she woke up, a smiling nurse showed her something that would have provoked laughter had it belonged to anybody else, an amorphous face, crinkled by the cares of this troubrous world, orange in hue, more like a monkey than a beautiful boy. She heard herself saying in a voice she scarcely recognised : " Is that mine ? " And the nurse, having a sense of humour, replied promptly : " He'll claim you as his, Mrs. Lynn, when he gets hungry. He weighs just over nine pounds ; and I'm proud of him, if you aren't."

Pride began to stir in Mary.

Her first thought—as she recalled afterwards with rueful dismay—was entirely personal. She became acutely sensible of her own sufferings, long-drawn-out, intermittent, tediously exasperating, cumulative in intensity, twenty-four hours in Gethsemane ! Did all women endure this ? Later on, both nurse and doctor assured her that her case had been perfectly normal and comparatively easy. *Easy——!*

The baby grew pink ; the wrinkles vanished. He was a beautiful boy with a reassuring grip already in his tiny fingers. It was premature to affirm that he was the living image of his father, but, undeniably, he had his eyes.

So Mary sang to herself the *Magnificat*.

## V

There were no complications. A healthy woman recovered swiftly. The doctor was " very pleased " with her, so the nurse said.

Mentally and physically she was gladdened by an immense reaction, more, a resurrection of love and happiness. Alone

with Lynn's son, she seemed to have begun a second honeymoon, a sort of glorification and justification of the first. When she became Lynn's wife, even as she walked down the aisle upon his arm, she had thought : "Do I know this man who is now mine ?" And knowledge of him, intimate knowledge, had come slowly, a series of delightful surprises, as if she were walking in an unknown, enchanting garden, wandering down this path and that, aware of fresh beauties at every turn. Poor Felicia's experience had been so different. . . . Felicia had told her : "I didn't want a child by him, but it came. They *will* come—wanted or unwanted."

This seed germinated during the weeks following the birth when she had to give almost undivided attention to her baby. Some thank-offering must be made. Hitherto Mary had not concerned herself with charitable organisations beyond subscribing generously to them. She had never visited children's hospitals or Maternity Homes. Her doctor, perceiving that she was interested, spoke of these, and indicated how much was still to be done. To "do" something for the unwanted babies and those that were neglected became gradually an overmastering interest. Meanwhile, was it absolutely certain that her own child was free from taint ? Finally, she took her doctor into full confidence, exacting the truth from him.<sup>1</sup> He listened to her story with sympathetic attention. He offered, modestly enough, to call in a specialist, but he declared his conviction that the baby was perfectly normal, responding satisfactorily to certain tests, one of which provoked howls of protestation.

" You can laugh," said the doctor, " because he cries."

Mary did laugh, as she pressed the mite closer to her bosom.

" I shan't tell anybody else," she said.

" Why should you ? You have borrowed trouble enough." He chuckled, adding slowly : " I see that your eggs are all in one basket, watch the basket."

She needed no encouragement to do that. From the moment when the baby smiled at her, shadows of the past fled away. . . .

## VI

Giving life to another, if regarded as a great adventure, affects the mother profoundly. In Mary's case, what had been subjective and emotional vanished with the shadows. She went back to her writing in a new spirit. She saw clearly two objectives—her son and her father. As soon as she was strong enough she tackled the third—her work in the poverty-stricken districts in Kensington. She established a *crèche*. Felicia supplied (vicariously) the sinews of war, being blessed with a coaxing face which she carried to magnates of the Stock Exchange. Mary took her face to the colonel of Lynn's regiment. She made him understand that her *crèche* was to be a memorial to Lynn ; the regiment "responded" nobly. Money flowed in. . . .

All this, and what it led to subsequently, began with Mary's interest in Felicia's children. When Felicia asked : "Are you going to mother the whole neighbourhood ?" Mary replied promptly : "Conditions are awful ; babies die like flies. Nobody knows much about it ; and nobody cares, but, somehow, I care, and when my babies put on weight my soul sings within me." Felicia, unable to soar to such heights, remarked that she felt exactly like that when she sold a hat.

One may touch briefly upon another influence subtly pervading the young men and women of that day. A new century had begun. The word "twencenter" was coined. Old shibboleths were scrapped. Long before the War dragged to its close, the more ardent spirits voiced the claims of the proletariat, universally stigmatised as the Great Unwashed. It began to occur to the more enlightened that washing is a synonym for soap and that soap must be provided. Probably Marie Antoinette was sincere in her conviction that the starving hordes in Paris could satisfy hunger with cake if bread were not forthcoming. At any rate, the comfortably well-to-do wriggled uneasily in their armchairs. It dawned upon them, in their less robust moments, that a chain holding together all the units of a huge nation was dependent upon the weakest link. The

link between themselves and the dwellers in slums appeared to be wearing thin. Nevertheless any audacious spirit who predicted revolt and revolution was laughed out of court. . . .

Insensibly, Mary began to drift away from her more easy-going friends, delightful people who said the right thing at the right time, and were Christians, or thought they were, because they professed to be content with their station in life. The others, the strenuous workers, were not so agreeable. When they overworked they waxed aggressive or relaxed into sullen silence. To deal faithfully with tired mothers, particularly if one happened to be tired oneself, taxed Mary's patience, tact, and commonsense to the *n*th degree.

Her *crèche*, fortunately, was not far from her own house ; and she had secured the services of a capable matron, who had been Second in Command in a children's hospital. Up-to-date methods of baby treatment prevailed. Felicia spoke of the *crèche* as Mary's howling paradise, but, somehow, the howlers soon stopped howling. Once a week, on weighing day, Mary and Matron sat at a table, whilst mothers filed past, each in turn popping her naked infant into the scales' basket. Mary kept a *dossier*. She knew all about the liars, the tipplers, and the humbugs ; she knew when "dope" had been given ; she could sniff from afar dirty feeding-bottles. Hardened offenders needed drastic dealing, but for the most part good-humoured chaff achieved its purpose.

## VII

The baby was christened Michael, which means "who is complete." Mary postponed the christening because she wished to make sure that the child *was* complete. When his name was bestowed upon him, he crowed.

Looking back afterwards upon these days and weeks, and the weeks seemed hardly to be distinguished from the days, Mary wondered at her own activities. Her few leisure moments were devoted to maternal speculations.

If pre-natal influence was seriously to be reckoned with, the boy might become a writer. She had forced upon herself concentration, absorbed in her literary work. After her confinement, she went back to it, but intermittently. Reading over what she had written with such detachment as she could achieve some of the passages seemed to have been inspired by Graves. Her publisher said so, although he preferred what he called the "authentic" Mary, an adjective that provoked discussion.

What was the authentic Mary?

What would be the authentic Michael? A lively imagination envisaged Graves and Lynn at grips over the baby. He might, when his pin feathers were grown, develop into that rare creature a doer and a dreamer. Of such were the Kingdom of Heaven!

"You are both," said the publisher.

"Am I?"

"That is my considered opinion. Are you conscious of civil war? To which do you hasten—your work in the slums, or your work at your father's desk?"

"I—I run to Michael's cradle."

"But that is instinct."

"Thank you for not calling it duty. My friend, Mrs. Norman, asserts that women do what they want to do. In that sense duty is pleasure."

"When this book is off your chest, I want you to tackle a novel. I pledge myself to print it."

"Reckless man——!"

"Not at all. I have a nose. It is in you to do fine creative work."

"Twenty years hence," she smiled, "I shall know more about that."

She was thinking of creative work already done.

Finally, when her book was published, kindly critics repeated what the publisher had said, beholding in the biographer of Graves a potential playwright or novelist with remarkable gifts of characterization. The book "sold"; it was talked about; incidentally it created a demand for some of Graves' lighter work. All this was very pleasant

and encouraging. Felicia said to Mary : " You have the look of a cat who has just swallowed a fat canary." To this Mary replied : " I have swallowed a lot of press-clippings, and I find them indigestible."

What followed is a matter of conjecture. A tremendous temptation assailed Mary ; she alone could measure it. The younger friends of her father, certainly every novice whom he had helped, " set about " Michael's mother, almost pestering her to death. They believed that the stream would rise higher than its source ; they insisted that Graves' daughter would find a niche in the Temple of Fame, a niche denied to him. Mary smiled at them. They meant well ; but she questioned their valuations and re-valuations. Her doctor, much older than herself, had a word to say about these mental exercises :

" What price do you set upon ambition, Mrs. Lynn ? So often nothing fails like success. It fails always when greater things are sacrificed to it. A man who rises high above the common herd loses touch with his fellows. If you take up writing as a profession, it may come between you and all that you are doing now. I think it must ; I don't know. There are exceptions to every rule."

Mary assimilated this, recalling that guarded flame, her father. Nobody would guard her.

And so it came to pass that the temptation to write was resisted. From that moment she ceased to be the daughter of Graves and became, whole-heartedly, the mother of Michael.

## CHAPTER III

### MICHAEL AND PRIMROSE

#### I

FROM the day of his birth, Mary had wondered what Michael would find to "do" in life, and, tentatively, during the happy years of his childhood, she probed deep into his active mind in the endeavour to discover its traffics and excursions. She found it a mind of many facets, restlessly eager to adventure wherever the fancy of the moment might dictate. For instance, when he was little more than seven, he took an afternoon "off" without asking for leave of absence. A policeman brought him home in a cab. He had been knocked down by a butcher's cart when crossing a roaring thoroughfare. A wheel, fortunately not too heavy, had passed over his body inflicting injuries that might have been serious. He said calmly :

"I've been run over, Mum. Course I shall die."

The policeman allayed an anxious mother's fears.

"Wheel just missed his ribs, Madam. He's more frightened than hurt."

"I'm not frightened," protested Michael.

The doctor who had brought him into the world was summoned. Michael had to remain in bed for a few days. Alone with his mother he explained that he had wanted to visit the British Museum. Although he was in pain at the time, he perpetrated a joke.

"I wanted to see if the mummies there were like you."

"Were they?"

"I never got there."

At his own wish, he was sent later on to a small day-school from which he ran away, presenting himself at

luncheon breathless and excited. He mentioned casually that a friend was cooling himself in the hall.

"We hooked it together."

"Why?"

"For fun."

"No other reason?"

"We thought it would be just heavenly in the park."

Mary provided luncheon for the truants and took them back to durance vile afterwards. Incidentally, she was enlightened further by the friend, who explained bashfully that Micky had planned the affair. His account of the escapade was epic : Micky's wits had surmounted obstacles ; Micky, obviously, had initiative, powers of resource, audacity—and brazen cheek. In the memory of man no boy had ever "hooked it" from an establishment presided over by two capable (and kindly) spinsters.

"He dared me to do it," said Micky gaily. "I couldn't take a dare from *him*, could I?"

Mary dissembled her amusement, asking gravely :

"Did Micky dare you to come with him?"

"Yes ; he did."

"I see. Well, you will have to settle your accounts with the ladies. You have hurt their feelings ; and they may hurt your hands."

"They can't hurt much," declared Micky.

## II

Remembering Lynn's indictment of the public (and private) school system, Mary put off the evil day of sending Michael from home. She was fortified in this decision by what her friends had to say. They had plenty to say. The dawn of a new century had quickened controversy which raged about the mistakes of the past and the potentialities of the future. Mary's friends styled themselves up-to-date, but she told herself, humorously, that she couldn't travel at their speed to conclusions not yet approved by experience. Speed dismayed her. For the rest, she knew that she *had*

to live in the present, engrossed by the claims of each passing minute. Minutes glided by too swiftly for her. Really there was no time for self-analysis and introspection. The fact that she had a child to whom she was able to give so-called *advantages* aroused an ever-increasing interest in other children and in all weaklings. She worked indefatigably in mean streets, the great school of the humanities, and absorbed their lessons.

When Michael was nearly ten, she was frightened out of her wits. Suddenly, his robust health failed. She had taken him to some entertainment in an overheated, ill-ventilated hall. Without any warning he fainted. The family doctor was not alarmed, but he prescribed quiet and country air ; the heart was affected, overstrained. . . .

Looking back, long afterwards, Mary realised what an upheaving event this temporary physical breakdown had been in her life and the boy's. She never hesitated ; she had profound faith in her old friend. She let the Kensington house, and moved into the depths of the country, where she knew nobody. An old manor house standing in a lovely garden with lawns sloping to a river beguiled her. When friends said : " You will hate it," she replied : " I want to find out whether I shall." It was certain that Michael would not hate it.

This self-imposed exile was Mary's first excursion into the Land of Nod. However, it did not occur to her that history was repeating itself. But after the excitements of the move, when she found herself alone in a remote rural district, she remembered that Michael's father had been taken by his parents to an obscure village in France. . . .

So far as Michael was concerned the change was beneficial —an immense success. Mary felt as if she had gone back twenty years. All her neighbours were Victorians. The parson's wife, when she heard that there had been callers, remarked sharply : " The people you will want to know, Mrs. Lynn, will call last." Very few people called, and those who did imposed upon the newcomer their prehistoric views upon all subjects within and without their ken. Mary pulled herself together, reflecting : " If these good

worthy souls bore me, I am a bore. I must interest myself in what interests them." You may be sure that she plunged into parochial work, *as she understood it*, with a zest for reform that was disconcerting to the Laodicean parson and his wife. She was the lady of a tiny manor, and the condition of the cottages in the village offended her senses, particularly her nose, a most sensitive organ. The local landlord, a many-acred squire, took things as he and his father before him had found them. His wife happened to be a doormat. Unfortunately they had no children. At a moment when it was important to find playmates of his own age for Micky, Mary was at a loss where to seek for them.

Somebody—probably a mere man—has affirmed that the laws of supply and demand adjust themselves automatically : perhaps they do ; perhaps they don't. It is, however, reasonably certain that our objectives are attained, if the will to win is strong enough. That will to do everything in her power on behalf of Micky took possession of Mary. By the merest chance, a playmate for Micky fell out of the blue. Felicia had a sister, as unlucky as herself in the matrimonial gamble, but like Felicia a "good sort." This lady's husband had a well-paid official position in equatorial Africa, a climate lethal for children and for men who behave as children. To Mary Felicia had been outspoken about her brother-in-law. He had earned the handle to his name, and the initials that came after it, *but he drank !* An equatorial thirst, controlled in a more temperate zone, might, so Felicia said, wipe out an efficient public servant. . . .

Now Mary had met Sir Rupert Cheverton and liked him. Her large maternal heart, too, had warmed towards little Primrose, his only child, about a year younger than Micky. With Lady Cheverton she became intimate at sight, because both sisters had that indefinable "way" with them which is such an asset in human intercourse. They were women whom other women wanted to "help" if they could, inasmuch as each was so plucky in trying to help herself without assistance from others. Each was incapable of self-pity.

When Sir Rupert's leave was nearly up, Lady Cheverton was torn in two between the conflicting claims of husband and child. Felicia rushed down into the wilds of East Sussex to talk things over.

" You look wonderfully well, Mary."

" I'm well in body, because Micky is ' responding ' to country air and food. Whether they agree with me or not doesn't matter. You bring with you an invigorating whiff of Sloane Street. How's the hat-shop ? "

" Business is booming because I stick to it, like a limpet. No complaints. I wrote to you that I wanted to talk about Rupert and Dorothy. Dorothy is beside herself. I hate to exhibit the gibbering skeleton in her cupboard, but I must. Rupert has only one more year to go. Then he will get promotion ; he might get anywhere with his abilities. If he goes back alone, Dorothy believes that she will never see him again. She has decided that she *must* go with him."

" I quite understand."

" Yes—you would. She has a restraining influence. But she can't take the child. What is she to do with her ? She suggested leaving her with me. Well, I simply had to incriminate myself. I know that I can't have it both ways. So do you. And really I'm beginning to think that we're exceptional in that. We two don't kid ourselves. I told Dorothy that I dared to brag that I was a good woman of business and a very indifferent mother. You didn't go on with your writing because you are a good mother, wonderful in my eyes. Still your case is not on all fours with mine. If I chucked the hat-shop, I couldn't educate my children decently. And, in any case, I doubt whether I could be the devoted Mummy that you are. I flatly refuse to be responsible for little Primrose. Dorothy has mothered her properly. Dorothy loathes the idea of finding a ' home ' for the poor darling. The day before yesterday, I had a brain-wave. Dorothy says so, and it is so. She would leave Primrose with you joyfully and thankfully, if—if you'll take her. . . ."

## III

Mary took the child.

She did so with her eyes wide open, peering into the future. She did not "kid" herself that she was doing a kind and charitable action sustained by the highest motives. Her motives were as mixed as a fruit salad. The fact that she wanted to find a playmate and companion for Micky may have been unduly salient, but, on the other hand, she had hoped to find a jolly boy, not a delicate girl, an elusive little sprite who would exact constant care and attention. Oddly enough, too, she was disagreeably sensible of the child's charm. To give Micky a sister—for it amounted to that—who might wind herself round his enfeebled heart, with the knowledge that the child might be summoned back to her parents at any moment, was asking for possible trouble. The pair had met. They had "got on" together excellently. There was no doubt whatever in Mary's mind that Micky would welcome Primrose uproariously as a temporary sister. More, each would react upon the other to their common benefit. A lively boy might be too lively for Micky, who had to be kept "quiet" for several hours each day.

But, far outweighing all these minor considerations, was an uncanny premonition that Primrose would not be taken away. Sir Rupert would not be restrained by his wife. And she, unhappy woman, might fall a victim to that terrible climate, unendurable save by the very strong. . . .

Some fortunate persons can come quickly to a vital decision. Mary happened to be one of them. Felicia arrived at Frodsham-on-Rother in time for tea. After breakfast, on Sunday morning, Mary said that she would "take on" Primrose.

"It's the best thing that could have happened," declared Felicia.

Asquith's immortal phrase was not then current. Mary laughed, not whole-heartedly:

"Time will tell," she murmured. "Time plays a waiting game, doesn't he?"

“ You will love Primrose.”  
“ Yes ; that scares me a bit.”  
“ You funny old Mary——!”  
“ I can love—and hate.”  
“ What do you hate ? ”  
“ My hates are general not particular. I hate humbug, and ingratitude, and everything and everybody—unclean.”  
“ But—who doesn’t ? ”

Mary was prepared to maintain that humbug, for example, was dear to many people who might call it by another name. Her father, who had forgotten Mr. Barnum, contended that Britons loved humbug and practised hypocrisy as a fine social art. But she left Felicia’s question unanswered, because she was thinking at the moment of education, another theme dear to Graves.

“ What I hate most of all,” she said slowly, “ is ignorance. I don’t mean illiteracy. That is bad enough in a country which spends more on education and gets less than any other so-called civilised community. No ; I’m speaking of the ignorance of life as it is lived here and as it might be lived, the ignorance of our own bodies, leaving out minds and souls. It isn’t the fault of the teachers in the schools, although some of them are hidebound by convention. Can one conceive of a healthy mind in an unhealthy body ? And if a mother knows nothing about her own body, how can she teach her children, if she tries to teach them, anything except her own ignorance ? ”

“ If you’re off on that—— ! ”  
“ I am just wondering, in my own prosaic way, whether your sister wants me to treat Primrose as if she were my own child ? ”

“ Of course she does.”  
“ You can tell her from me that there are going to be no blinds down between my Micky and me.”

Felicia wriggled. She was thinking of blinds down between herself and her boy, who had inherited some of his father’s disabilities.

“ Oh-h-h. Is that a hint to me ? ”  
“ No.”

" I suppose when the time comes I shall get some man to do the dirty work."

" But it isn't dirty work ; and it's mothers' work."

" Anyway, I—I funk it. I may talk to my girl——"

" Will you ? "

" Bother you, Mary ! "

" Yes ; I'm a bothering person, as the parson in Frodsham will tell you. He's a funker. If you come with us to church this morning, you will hear him preach an unconvincing sermon upon doctrinal points far above the heads of his congregation. That's *his* ignorance. When I listen to *him*, I have an uneasy feeling that he's putting into words his own doubts and misgivings. When he tells us, deprecatingly, of his conviction that we agree with him, I am sorely tempted to rise in my pew and exclaim dramatically : ' *I don't* agree with you ; you are giving us stones which you can't digest yourself.' Why doesn't he give us bread ? He's a parish priest, but his sermons are never parochial. You will not be surprised to hear that his parishioners are drifting off to the chapel, where the minister is not afraid of the parish pump."

" The pump——? "

" Which pumps water not fit to drink. One old gaffer confided to me that he didn't want any meddlin' wud it, 'cause it was rare an' searchin' meddyccine."

Felicia betrayed anxiety.

" I hope, Mary, you won't get into trouble down here by stirring up trouble. People get used to bad water, and insanitary conditions, and all that."

" And all that I hate and fear. Let's get back to little Primrose. If she comes to me I must have a free hand."

" But I repeat—of course."

" Then all is well."

#### IV

When she told Micky that Primrose was coming to them, the boy was delighted.

" We shall have great larks, Mummy."

"She's a delicate child. When you are alone together you will have to remember that. You must behave as her knight."

"Rather—! I shall set about building a raft at once. We can camp out when it's warmer. This is perfectly splendid, simply r-ripping!"

"You'll play together and work together."

"Do our lessons with you?"

"No."

"Why ever not?"

She hesitated, and spoke out—tentatively. Would he understand, could he understand the difficulties that were assailing her? Firm in her conviction that ignorance in all its Protean forms should be dealt with promptly, she spoke simply:

"I can't play mother and governess, Micky. I can't kiss you and smack you."

"You haven't smacked me yet."

He grinned disarmingly at her.

"But I ought," she went on calmly, "to have punished you upon several occasions, only, you see, I funk'd it."

"Mum—!"

"I was afraid that you might look on me as your judge and executioner. You have forgotten, Micky, but years ago when you were a mite I smacked you. You took it like a man, a very furious little man. You glared at me, and then you said: 'I hate you. I wish I'd never had a Mummie.'"

"I said that?"

"Yes. At the moment you meant it, poor lamb!"

"What a filthy beast I must have been."

"No—a child. Your fit of temper passed quickly; you crept back into my arms. . . . Well, it made an impression on me; it made me think of heaps of things which you can't understand yet. Try to get this into your head. The big thing, the biggest thing in the world, is love. When that goes there is so little left. . . ."

She paused. Michael's eyes were on hers. Between them she could see a vertical line. He was trying to understand. She smiled, and patted his cheek.

" You know how I hate lies——?"

Michael replied as naively as Felicia :

" Who doesn't ? "

" What is the difference between a fib and a lie ? "

The vertical line deepened. His answer amused her.

" Boys lie ; girls tell fibs."

" Top marks, Micky. Your wits are sharp enough, almost too sharp. I feel encouraged to go on. When you were at school did you tell any lies ? "

He wriggled.

" Not many, I hope. Let's put it another way. When you did your work badly, and when you were asked to explain, did you make excuses ? "

" Ye-es."

" So did I when I was your age ; but my father laughed at me. I found out that I couldn't take him in. Yes ; he laughed at me till I was ashamed of myself ; and then he said : ' I can't teach you, child, unless you play the game.' After that I did try to play the game, at any rate with him."

" I'll bet you did."

" Your father always played the game."

" Good for him ! "

" It was good for him. Now, sit tight and listen. I'm going to find a governess for you and Primrose ; and I shall get the right sort. She will be a companion to me when you are larking about with Primrose. She will do my spade-work, do what I shrink from doing—punish you both if you deserve punishment. Have you got it ? "

" Yes."

v

A governess was found—a personality. Lady Cheverton said that she and Mary had raked England over with a fine toothcomb to find the paragon. Luck took a hand in the quest. Mary's London friends, who may be spoken of genetically as belonging to the *intelligentsia*, were smitten with the ardour of the chase. Finally, Miss Henriette Mitchell presented herself.

Her first interview with Mary, which took place in the presence of Lady Cheverton, and in her sitting-room, was a notable passage-at-arms. Miss Mitchell's appearance was not prepossessing. Dark eyes dominated a pale face surmounting a short, sturdily-built figure. But Mary noted instantly admirable extremities : small slender feet (well-shod) and firm, capable, finely modelled hands, a precious inheritance from a French grandmother. Lady Cheverton described the pale face as Napoleonic. Obviously here was a lady of indomitable will. In all the earlier portraits of the great Napoleon, there is a striking impression of defiance. At the first glance at Miss Mitchell, Mary thought : "She'll never do ; she carries a chip on her shoulder." Mary made certain that Miss Mitchell would speak in hard, aggressive tones. To her surprise and relief the stranger spoke beautifully. What she said, the first greetings, were exquisitely articulate. A trained voice with infinite modulations !

It appeared that she had taught English in a select girls' school situate outside Paris. Of her competence to teach English—or anything else—there was no question. Her credentials as a teacher were gilt-edged ; and her French was impeccable.

Mary glanced at the credentials and passed them to Lady Cheverton.

"Why did you leave this lady ?" she asked.

"Because I have no stomach for French pupils. I took this position for two reasons : it was well-paid ; and I wished to perfect my knowledge of French. As a matter of fact I learnt French before I learnt English, but I am, and I shall remain, English to the backbone."

Mary nearly exclaimed :

"Three rousing cheers !"

Miss Mitchell was engaged and took her leave. Mary and Lady Cheverton were left alone.

"She has a liver," said Mary.

"She has lights," declared Lady Cheverton.

"A sense of duty almost—formidable."

"What a diction——!"

It was agreed that Miss Mitchell might be a "treasure" if—a big if—the children were not scared out of their wits at sight of her.

"They won't scare her," added Mary.

She returned to Frodsham-on-Rother none too easy in her mind, but Miss Mitchell's voice had beguiled her. She was certainly a gentlewoman, but her methods with young pupils might be ungentle. Had she a sense of humour? There had been one flash of humour when she was told that she would have to cope with a boy and a girl.

"Good! I play Jack against Jill."

"You mean—?"

"Competition. Jack will have to hold his own against Jill. My pupils will eat out of the same dish. The boy won't like it if the girl gets the tid-bits."

"What do you call the tid-bits?"

Miss Mitchell smiled, showing serviceable teeth, obviously her own. When she smiled her sallow skin seemed to brighten.

"My tid-bits, Mrs. Lynn, are my smiles. I don't hold them cheap. My heart is in my body, not on my sleeve."

This pleased Mary. Already Micky had indicated eagerness for what is hard to get. Like his father, he disdained too facile triumphs. Mary felt that it would be no mean achievement to win Miss Mitchell's rare smiles. The rest lay upon the knees of the gods.

She was pleased, also, with Miss Mitchell's well-cut garments. Her handkerchief was of fine cambric. Evidently she was "nice" in such matters, with a proper respect for her own person. Oddly enough it was impossible to label her as Victorian or Edwardian. She might be a happy compromise between the two.

If she could inspire love even as she inspired respect, she would indeed be a "treasure."

the schoolroom began. The leave-taking between Prim and her mother had been cruelly poignant. But, during the railway journey, the child recovered some measure of self-control. She was alone with Mary in a first-class carriage, cuddled up against her, clutching Mary's hand...

All children are creatures of surprises. Mary looked at the child's tear-stained face and wondered what would happen when she met Michael. The boy had been prepared, coached, warned against tears and a possible "scene." With the gay confidence of youth, he had nodded reassuringly:

"She'll be quite all right with me."

Would she be quite all right with anybody till many sad days had passed?

Micky received the travellers on arrival. He, with no hint from his mother, had planned what to do. Possibly he had Ivanhoe in his mind, because Mary had read that entrancing romance aloud to him only recently. As soon as Primrose hopped out of the dingy fly that conveyed Mary and her from Etchingham to Frodsham, she beheld Micky brandishing a sword, his father's sword, solemnly presented to him by Mary on his tenth birthday. A condition had been attached to this notable gift: "You are not to play with your sword."

Primrose stared at him.

Micky lowered the point and bowed.

"I am Sir Michael Lynn," he exclaimed. "You are my liege lady. My sword is drawn to protect you against all minions and varlets. I bid you welcome to our castle. Enter, and let the drawbridge fall!"

Primrose laughed. The valiant knight, having said his lines, carefully rehearsed in the presence of the gardener, a sworn friend and ally, laid down his Excalibur and embraced his fair damsel.

"We're going to have late dinner," he whispered.

Mary paid the fly-man, and added a tip that provoked a fervent: "God bless you, M'm."

"The great experiment hasn't begun too badly," she thought, as she followed the children into the panelled hall.

## CHAPTER IV

### MITCHIE

#### I

AS Mary dressed for dinner that night, her thoughts hovered about the meeting of the two children and the astounding change in Primrose. The pair had prattled together till the dressing bell rang. What a blessed relief in one sense!—And yet, were all children so mercurial? When she was nine, would the gay company of a boy have sufficed her, had she just been separated indefinitely—for such an immeasurable period as a year at least—from her beloved father? No “grown-up” can deal with these questions. Thoughts concerning even the greatest events of childhood are clouded by the mists of time? Can a man of thirty remember exactly how he *felt* when at the age of nine he lost his mother? A tap at the door disturbed these reflections. The nurse appeared.

“If you please, M’m, Miss Primrose wants to wear her ‘pink,’ a little party frock.”

“Let her wear what she likes.”

“Very good, M’m.”

Censure informed the “very good.” Nurse, worthy soul, probably thought that a bereaved child should be arrayed in sable. Obviously, Prim’s thoughts were set on prinking. Another straw!—Mary let it drift out of sight, slightly dismayed because now, when she had accepted full responsibility for another woman’s child, she told herself that she hardly knew Primrose. She had been captivated by a dear little face, filled with pity for the unhappy mother, swept off the rock of experience by a

tidal wave of sympathy. What lay behind soft melting eyes and under auburn curls ?

The children went on prattling joyously throughout dinner. All traces of tears had vanished, appetite for food returned. After funerals, old and young alike tackle the baked meats with optimistic zest.

Nevertheless Mary looked for reaction when the child went to bed. She curbed her fond impulse to play "mother," rightly assuming that much tenderness might provoke a passion of emotion bad for an over-tired little mind and body. But, at eleven, she crept into the dressing-room assigned as bedroom to Primrose. A big bedroom, facing south, had been turned into a nursery. In this Micky's nurse, a faithful retainer, slept. Micky's room was the dressing-room to Mary's bedroom.

The child was not in her bed.

Mary supposed that she was sleeping with the nurse, possibly frightened at sleeping alone. But Lady Cheverton had told her that the child was accustomed to sleeping alone. She went to her own room and began to undress. Before she got into bed, it was her habit to take a last reassuring look at Micky. She lit a candle—there was no electric light in the manor-house—shaded the flame with her hand, and opened the dressing-room door. A faint exclamation escaped her.

The two children were clasped in each other's arms—fast asleep. Mary smiled and frowned.

Babes in the wood !

She hadn't the heart to disturb innocent slumberers. Never had she suffered from that bane—sentimentality. Even sentiment—such a different quality—was tempered by commonsense ; imagination, hers in full measure, kept reasonable bounds. Watching the children, she could guess what had happened. Nurse, to be sure, had seen to it that Miss Primrose was properly tucked up in bed. Left alone the reaction had come, and then the fair damsel had sought her sworn knight, a *preux chevalier* prompt to observe the sacrosanct rites of hospitality and sanctuary.

Mary returned to her room.

## II

She lay awake for hours.

A fresh thought tingled through her tissues, a thought, which a few hours previously she would have dismissed as ludicrous. Did coming events cast their shadows before? The well-worn tag became insistent. She had thrown these two together; they loved to be together. . . .

Already to Michael the appeal of weakness to strength was irresistible and hereditary. She had encouraged this, knowing well that the weak made the running for the strong. Weakness must be hereditary with Rupert Cheverton's daughter.

Ultimately, of course, Mary fell asleep laughing at herself and her mental vagabondage. But the seed planted deep down in some zone of subconsciousness germinated. She had seen Primrose as the wife of her son. And with the vision had come for the first time the bitter-sweet certainty that some woman, some day, would take her place in the boy's heart.

She awoke, next morning, to find both children clambering into her four-poster.

"Prim slept with me," declared Micky.

Mary chuckled. To call the tiny baggage "prim" seemed inapposite.

"I wanted Micky," said the small maid firmly, "'cos I was unhappy. I thought he might be cross, but he wasn't, not the least little bit. Do you mind?"

"Tell me. What makes you think I *might* mind?"

"I—I don't know. Grown-ups are so funny about some things, aren't they?"

"It's all right for once. To please me, don't do it again."

"Why ever not?" demanded Sir Michael.

A poser, this, not to be evaded, not to be answered lightly.

"Daddy and Mummy sleep together," piped Primrose.

"It is healthier for children to sleep apart," said Mary, with grave authority. "You have each a small bed in a

small room. Children need all the fresh air they can get, and all the sleep too. Didn't you two have a long talk before you fell asleep?"

They owned up to this.

"And you had stayed up later than usual as a special treat. There are other reasons why children should not sleep in the same bed. Suppose, Micky, that you were going to have measles or whooping-cough, would you like to give them to Primrose? You would, if you slept together. So, promise me that this won't occur again without my permission."

They promised.

A week later Miss Mitchell took command of the school-room. She arrived with a large trunk and two big boxes. The boxes held books and half a dozen framed photographs of famous statues, including the Venus of Milo. Even as Mary had hoped, Miss Mitchell's soft voice put to flight apprehensions aroused by her formidable appearance. Her pupils stood before her obviously intimidated. Miss Mitchell eyed them keenly. Perhaps she detected curiosity. In her disarming tones, she said pleasantly :

"I hope that you two will be good enough to help me to unpack my boxes. My *children* are inside them."

Primrose gasped.

"They—they must be dead."

"Some are dead; some are living. My books are my children, very good children—all of them." She turned to Mary. "What a delightful garden you have."

"I'll show you the kitchen garden," said Micky. "Our gardener can eat golden plums, stones and all. He knows how to set night-lines."

"A most accomplished person," said Miss Mitchell briskly, "I shall be happy to make his acquaintance."

Thus the ice was broken.

Once more Mary felt intensely relieved and thankful. She, not the children, was slightly afraid of the new governess. Miss Mitchell was clever, one of those words which is not to be found in our earlier literature. It meant once—complaisant, as Mary was aware. Cleverness, in its common-

sense, exuded from Miss Mitchell. Now unexpectedly, she had shown herself to be complaisant. Mary recalled a line out of Dana's *Before the Mast*—" If we pull together you will find me a clever fellow ; if we don't you'll find me a bloody rascal." She knew that she could pull together with any complaisant woman. So often clever women were amazingly stupid because they were not complaisant.

After tea, the four marched round the domain. Before this pleasant pilgrimage Mary learnt that Miss Mitchell was a Londoner, like herself, as enthusiastic about London as the great Lexicographer. But she hated suburbs. . . .

The house itself had nothing notable about it. It was old, ramshackle, badly-planned, and inconvenient, but it held some fine Georgian furniture and a few fairly good pictures and prints. Upstairs, a long wide corridor ran east and west the length of the house, a delightful playground for children on rainy days. Miss Mitchell glanced at family portraits of lackadaisical ladies. When Mary said : " I can't think what they did here," Miss Mitchell replied : " They wore out thimbles." During three centuries, the Sheepshanks of Frodsham, so Mary told her, had lived in this house. Now the family was nearly extinct.

" Fortunately so," observed Miss Mitchell, " unless these portraits do them grave injustice."

She picked out, unerringly, the finer " bits " of furniture, and praised the mezzotints.

The gardens had real charm, velvety lawns, fine trees, and a distinguished " air " which is Nature's benediction upon every pleasure where the hand of Man is not too blatantly visible. There were no hideous beds blazing with geraniums, calceolaria, and lobelia. The Sheepshanks had been too impoverished to spend money on these hardy annuals. But some Georgian squire had been a lover of privet walks, lily pools, topiary work, and fountains. Upon the lawns Mary pointed out sweet-smelling herbs which diffused a faint aromatic fragrance when pressed underfoot. . . .

" On fine days," said Miss Mitchell, " my pupils and I will work in this quiet garden."

The river Rother provoked a remark.

" Is it always as dirty as that ? "

" Always."

" Dear, dear ! Yellow as the Tiber ! "

" Have you seen the Tiber ? " asked Micky.

" I have, Michael. It is a notion with me that the Tiber, when the Romans said their prayers to it, was a cleaner and more inspiring river than it is to-day."

" It wasn't, " said Micky.

" Bless me ! How do you know ? "

Solemnly Micky quoted :

*And a long shout of triumph  
Rose from the walls of Rome,  
As to the highest turret-tops  
Was splashed the yellow foam.*

Miss Mitchell smiled.

" Bravo, young man. Most apt. I throw my notion into the Rother. I wonder whether I ought to congratulate you or your mother."

" Mum gave me half a crown for learning ' Horatius.' "

" M'm. Here and now I offer you another half crown if you learn ' The Armada.' "

Later on, alone with Mary, Miss Mitchell spoke disdainfully of the *Lays* as doggerel and cheap jingle, unworthy of a great historian although admittedly they taught history to children. Thereupon the two ladies fell tooth and nail upon English prose and poetry, and enjoyed themselves thoroughly with devastating criticism of Mrs. Hemans, Adelaide Proctor, and the minor Victorian novelists. They linked hands and hearts over Keats, Shelley, George Eliot, Jane Austen, and Lamb. They agreed to disagree about Thackeray and Dickens. Miss Mitchell was an ardent Dickensian ; Mary preferred Thackeray.

Within twenty-four hours Miss Mitchell had established herself. Mary shook from her all qualms. She had secured the services of an efficient governess and a companionable woman.

## III

In less than six weeks, Miss Mitchell was called Mitchie to her face by both the children. For five weeks they had thus spoken of their governess behind her back—and not too discreetly.

" You call me Mitchie," she said calmly.

The children looked down their noses.

" In the schoolroom I expect my pupils to address me as Miss Mitchell. Out of the schoolroom, when we are together, I give you leave to call me—Mitchie. Why ? "

Her sharp " why's " recurred constantly, because it tickled Mitchie's humour to hear Michael's replies to them. Possibly, he too was aware that " why," coming imperatively from Mitchie, constituted a challenge to ready wits. An apt reply provoked the rare smile, severely withheld if an answer had no reason in it. Reason animated everything that Mitchie did or said ; she was not tolerant of unreason.

" Why have I given you two this permission ? "

Micky made a wild shot ; he had overheard Nurse " passing a remark " to the housemaid.

" Because your bark is worse than your bite ? "

" No. You haven't felt my bite yet. Wait till you do. Get this into your pates. In the schoolroom, I am in command—your superior officer. Discipline must be observed. Out of the schoolroom in the kitchen garden, for instance, I am not your superior. I am learning from you the names of birds. To-day, thanks to you, I can distinguish the notes of a blackbird from a thrush, and I know a chaffinch when I meet him. In time, thanks to you, I hope to know more about birds' eggs. So, you see, outside this room we meet more or less upon equal terms as friends."

" It's awfully decent of you, Miss Mitchell."

" No. It's fair give and take."

Shortly after this, Micky had experience of the lady's " bite." The boy had a quick temper and he liked to " show off " before Primrose. There was—as Mitchie

had hoped—wholesome competition between Jack and Jill over lessons. Jack had a retentive memory for what pleased him ; Jill was the plodder, and more amenable to discipline. She admired Jack's "cheek." He cheeked everybody except his mother and Mitchie. Some imp of mischief provoked the girl to "dare" the boy to cheek the autocrat of the schoolroom. Just once—for fun ! Secretly, she quivered with apprehension when Micky boldly accepted the challenge. When would he do it ? At the very first favourable opportunity.

" You watch on, Prim."

The opportunity presented itself at schoolroom tea, a substantial meal for the children. Mitchie dined with Mary. Neither of the children had to be taught table manners by their governess. But, up-to-date as Mitchie was in her methods of teaching and in her general dealings with her pupils, she had been reared herself in the old school that stood no nonsense about wholesome food. Children mustn't live to eat ; they must assuredly eat to live. For instance—bread-and-butter before jam ; no delicacies till the plain fare was swallowed.

Micky winked at Primrose, as he surveyed his first slice of bread-and-butter.

" Pass the jam, Prim."

Tremblingly, Prim obeyed. Micky helped himself generously.

" What are you doing ? " asked Mitchie.

" Can't you see that I'm helping myself to jam ? "

" Eat your bread-and-butter first."

" Why ? "

Primrose giggled. The " why " was an unmistakable imitation.

" Because I tell you to do so."

" But that isn't a *good* reason."

Another imitation, but this time Primrose was too frightened to giggle.

" Leave my room, sir, and go straight to your own."

" I—I won't."

" You will."

" No."

" Is it possible that you dare to defy ME ? "

" Yes."

Alone with the autocrat he would have surrendered unconditionally. Possibly he meant to surrender, unduly puffed up by the conviction that Mitchie would not resort to violence. She did. She possessed wrists of steel. A struggling, kicking, infuriated boy was carried to his bedroom and locked into it. Mitchie returned to the schoolroom to find Primrose in tears, which provoked rebuke.

" Do you cry because a silly little boy is naughty ? "

" I—I dared him to do it."

" What ? "

" I—I d-dared him to c-c-cheek you."

" Why ? "

" For fun."

" It wasn't much fun, was it, for him or you or me ? "

Without vouchsafing another word, Mitchie sat down upon a chair, pulled up her skirts, pulled down a stocking, and revealed a bleeding ankle and a contusion of the shin-bone.

" Fun——!" she snorted.

#### IV

Mary never heard of this revolt against authority. One hour of solitude restored sanity to Michael. He had to nurse *his* wounds (and his pride), but he was incapable of nursing a grievance. When Mitchie restored her prisoner to liberty, he had the grace to apologise. Talking the matter over with Primrose, they both agreed that Mitchie could bite. Her bite was worse than her bark. . . .

Mary wrote to Dorothy Cheverton weekly budgets. In one of them, she penned this line : " Mitchie is IT." Having thus written, using a slang expression not so current then as now, she reconsidered the epicene pronoun in a critical spirit. Certainly there was something " neuter " about Mitchie. Had she ever been kissed by a man ?—It was almost impossible to envisage Mitchie as a wife or a

mother. She might have been immortalised in stone as the Goddess of the Schoolroom. She did not suggest Minerva, inasmuch as that lady was physically brave. Mitchie, as the children soon found out, was terrified of cows and dogs and rats. She had the Londoner's rooted distrust of the countryside as a *terra incognita*. In the children's company, she cautiously embarked upon adventures and misadventures. This was her feminine side, which appealed to Micky's knightly instincts. He had the impudence to "dare" the august lady to slide down a stack into a big pile of hay. *She did it!* She had to do it—so she explained to Mary—to preserve her self-respect, but halfway down the perilous descent she lost her balance and pitched, head-first, into the hay. Primrose said to Mary: "There was such an *expliquée*!" Mary gathered that underclothing and underpinning had been exposed. The masculine side of this indomitable woman was inside. Concerning this Mary wrote to Lady Cheverton: "She would go to the stake in defence of her opinions *right or wrong*." She had a man's code of honour, rigorously upheld, a man's tenacity and fortitude, a man's disdain of all the small things which mean so much to the ordinary woman. . . .

The summer glided by too quickly. Once a week Mary journeyed to London, unwilling to abandon personal supervision of her *crèche*. She kept in touch with her old friends. Felicia Norman and her two children came to her during the summer holidays. During this visit, which lasted a fortnight, Felicia had something very disconcerting to say about Rupert Cheverton.

"It's all up with him, Mary."

"Felicia——!"

"Dolly says so. I'm horribly worried about her, and, Lawsy! how I hate worry."

"So does Primrose."

"You have found that out, have you? Of course, she's like Dolly and me. We had our good times before we married. Yes, it's so silly to worry about what can't be helped. Rupert won't pull himself together. I'm beginning

to think that the sooner it's over the better. I suppose Dolly will live with me, and then you'll be relieved of the care of another woman's child."

Mary winced.

"*Relieved?*" she echoed. "I—I don't know about that; I—I can't analyse my feelings. The child gets dearer to me every day."

"She adores you. That jumps to the eye."

Mary remained silent. Felicia said cheerfully :

"The experiment has been a gorgeous success. What a ray of sunshine!"

"So far," agreed Mary, "a success greater than I can measure. But really I give the credit to Mitchie."

Mitchie was away on her holiday, to be spent with her people of whom Mary knew next to nothing. She guessed that Mitchie's parents were impoverished. Mr. Mitchell "did" hack literary work in the Reading Room of the British Museum; Mrs. Mitchell was a chronic invalid. When Mitchie said : "*My* father, "or" *my* Mother" in a tone of voice loyal and possessive rather than tender, Mary restrained her curiosities. Mitchie's parents were essentially hers in the sense that they belonged to nobody else and that it was Mitchie's sacred duty to stand stoutly by them. Also, when Mitchie declared emphatically : "*My* father is clever," it might be inferred that the mother was not. Inasmuch, too, as Mitchie underrated mere cleverness, it might be further inferred that cleverness had not carried Mr. Mitchell far on any road.

Unwilling to discuss Mitchie with a woman who had never met her, Mary strayed back to Lady Cheverton.

"You are horribly worried about your sister. Is her health failing?"

"It must be. I can only read between the lines of her letters. Of the future she says nothing, poor darling. She might marry again; she might come into the hat-shop. But would she be a help or a hindrance? We think alike, two rattle-pates, but Dolly hasn't my working body. Really, my muscles and my digestion have saved me. Rupert has wrecked Dolly's digestion—and there you are."

Mary had no idea where she was.

Felicia, gallant little woman, hid her heart under a thin veneer of flippancy, a sort of fluffy "cheeriness" which came into fashion with the twentieth century. She hated what she called "pi" talk. So did Mary. Graves, in his whimsical way, with that tincture of obstinacy which sustains our critics, contended that men and women never change fundamentally. Character, temperament, and personal idiosyncrasies might be modified in childhood. After those impressionable years they dominated the individual ruthlessly. Lynn, better qualified than Graves to lay down the law on such a subject, had been emphatic upon what his early training had done for him. And Mary herself had wasted hours of futile speculation upon what she might have been had she gone to school and accepted the cut-and-dried standards of the young girls of her own time. *She had never "come out."* What had she missed? Listening to Dorothy Cheverton and Felicia when they spoke of their blooming time, of their innumerable "parties," of their tremendous interest in frocks and frills, of their flirtations, of their indefatigable efforts in search of excitements and amusements, she had been amazed and amused. It seemed to her that she hadn't missed much. . . .

Was Primrose a tiny replica of mother and aunt?

This visit of the Normans had thrown a searchlight upon Primrose as their flesh and blood. Felicia, as a child, must have been like her niece, much the same colouring and temperament. Mary set herself to work to give her visitors a good time. She hired a car which whirled them to the sea; there were expeditions every day; she set dainty food before them, consulted their tastes and inclinations, devoted herself, in fine, to them. Effusive gratitude was her reward. But, day after day, she noticed the kinship between Primrose and the Normans. The joys of the passing hour sufficed them. Micky was different. He had—objectives. With him ephemeral pleasures were means to a definite end. That was where the father "came out" so unmistakably. He wanted to go to the sea to learn to swim, not to paddle, build sand castles, and catch shrimps.

If Micky learnt to swim, Mary had promised him a canoe. Primrose pouted at the mention of swimming "lessons." She wanted to play with her cousins. . . . If she learnt to swim, she would share the promised canoe with Micky. A lure, but not enticing enough. After thinking things over from many points of view, too many to record, Mary came to the conclusion that Primrose could never have been sired by Lynn or mothered by her. Perhaps this conclusion intensified her increasing love and interest in the child. She couldn't look at her, and hear her joyous laugh, without being whirled to that white, blazing, sweltering Inferno where Rupert Cheverton was drinking himself to death, where his wife, powerless to stay the lifting hand, must be wondering whether she would have strength to endure to the end. . . .

Accustomed to dissemble her feelings, especially in the presence of children, she was distressed to discover that Micky had an inkling of the truth. When she was kissing him good night, after a strenuous day, he said coaxingly :

"Are you unhappy about anything, Mum?"

When she hesitated, he added quickly :

"You are, else you would say you weren't."

Mary sat upon the bed.

"I *am* unhappy. And I'm ever so sorry you have found that out, sorry and glad. Your father would have found it out. I never could keep my small troubles from him. When I see him peeping out of you, I am filled with gladness. My dear little son, I would keep unhappiness, the unhappiness of others, from you, if I could. You are having a jolly holiday——"

She paused to pick her words, looking deep into the boy's eyes, solemnly fixed on hers. With a sigh, she continued :

"I am unhappy because, because unhappiness is coming to Primrose."

"Measles? Or something beastly like that?"

"No. Don't interrupt me. It's so difficult to tell you. I'm wondering how much your father would tell you, if he were here. What I say must be a secret between us. You

do know that Sir Rupert and Lady Cheverton are living on the West Coast of Africa."

"Yes."

"It has been called—the White Man's Grave."

"Mum—!"

"That is an exaggeration. Strong men do their work out there and are little the worse for it. But Sir Rupert is not strong; nor is Lady Cheverton. The climate has been too much for them. I am unhappy, Michael, because at any moment little Primrose may find herself without a father."

Micky tried to assimilate this. Then he paid Mary his first overwhelming compliment.

"If Prim has her mother, she will be quite all right, just as I've been."

Mary hugged him to her. Before she left him, he was pledged anew to secrecy, pledged also to be extra "decent" to Primrose. Another tribute escaped him as she rose to go.

"I say, Mum. It's most awfully jolly to have a secret, even a hateful secret, with you."

v

The Normans returned to London; and in due time Mitchie, looking rather more sallow than usual, came back to Frodsham-on-Rother. A tinge of pink suffused her pale cheeks, when her pupils flung themselves into her arms. . . .

In the middle of chill October, Sir Rupert Cheverton died, and three weeks later Primrose was motherless.

## CHAPTER V

### A YEAR DRIFTS BY

#### I

MARY, again swept away by another tidal wave of sympathy, offered to keep Primrose, an offer gratefully accepted by Felicia and the child's executors, who behaved generously, and then washed busy hands of the whole affair. A suitable allowance would be paid half-yearly into Mrs. Lynn's bank account. What was over in the way of income would accumulate till the girl became of age. An income approximating to a thousand a year would be hers eventually. Mary barely gave a thought to that. She would have taken Primrose in her shift. She told herself that it was her manifest duty—and pleasure. Micky, youthful optimist, expressed himself in his own exuberant way as delighted. . . .

Mitchie, however, uttered a word of warning. Anything she happened to say about matters that did not concern her arrested attention, because she was incapable of insincerity. The children echoed her *dicta*: "Be honest—give your opinion, for what it's worth, if—if you are asked for it."

In this case Mary didn't ask for it. She had acquired the habit of acting, according to her lights, promptly and efficiently, without imposing burdens upon others.

"You have thought this all over," said Mitchie.

"Yes."

"Then there is nothing to be said."

"You can say anything you like to me, Mitchie."

"Thanks. Against the rule of a lifetime I will. You are presenting Michael with a sister and yourself with a daughter; practically you are 'adopting' this child."

"I suppose I am."

" Doubling your cares and responsibilities——"

" Do you think that they will be more than I can bear ? "

" I don't know. It's a leap into the dark. The child has charm, which beguiles even me. But I am not blind to the essential defects in her character—if she has a character——"

" Go on, please."

" I have not yet discovered anything positive in her. She is pleasure-loving, natural at her age ; she is plastic, sweetly amenable, eager to please, but a *weakling* ! "

" I—I know. How could she be anything else ? "

" You will have trouble with Master Micky, because he is masterful, but there are the makings of a fine man in him. You will have little or no trouble with Primrose for several years. Then her essential weakness may tax heavily your strength. God has given her much, but has He given her a thankful heart ? She takes all she can get as a matter of course."

" So did I when I was her age."

" I can hardly believe it. You are a giver not a getter And so am I. We have that in common. Roughly speaking, when attempting to estimate *character*, I divide men, women, and children into those two classes. Then you know where you are in your dealings with them."

" Up to a point, yes."

" I spoke too loosely. You know where you are with the givers ; with the getters, demanding more and more, you can be sure of only one thing, their importunity."

She spoke with an odd defiance, as if the importunity of others had been a thorn in her flesh. From that moment, Mary became sensible that Mitchie must have suffered ; suffering had hardened her, poor dear ! But she would refuse peremptorily to speak of herself, reject sympathy from a comparative stranger. She was " built " that way. Choking down these thoughts, Mary said hopefully :

" With you to help me——"

" Thanks. I am not too modest about myself. I can help and I shall help if I remain with you. You pay me a high salary, more than double what is paid to the ordinary governess, and I must earn my fees. But I might be taken from you—suddenly."

"I hope not."

"Thanks again. I regard it as a privilege to work for and with you, Mrs. Lynn."

They shook hands. Perfunctory kissing appealed to neither.

## II

The winter passed uneventfully, but not for the children. They went into the chicken-business. It was Mary's intention to buy two well-mannered ponies when Micky's heart functioned normally. To his mother's dismay, he persisted in outgrowing his strength, as the local doctor phrased it. He had learnt to swim during the summer holidays, and the promised canoe would be his most precious possession in May. Meanwhile, the chicken business absorbed his energies. Of chickens and ponies and everything connected with rural life Mary knew nothing. To use an American phrase—she "wanted to know." Very subtly, this quiet countryside obtruded itself upon her attention and interest. It made for contentment, not happiness. But Mitchie, a stickler for nice definitions, pointed out that contentment is static, whereas happiness is ecstatic and dynamic. Contentment, she argued, is largely a state of material comfort; happiness, in its divinest form, must be spiritual. Mary thrilled with happiness when Micky did or said anything that revealed his father in him. Mitchie had her ecstatic moments when she dwelt upon the beauty and grace of the Venus of Milo, or the *Ode to the West Wind*.

In and about Frodsham the spirit of the eighteenth century still lingered, moribund, senile. The village maidens rarely strayed far from the parish; motion to them was "fast." They had their fortunes told by an ancient dame, commonly reputed to be something of a "witch," they gathered St. John's Wort; and Naomi, the daughter of Mary's gardener, confided to Micky that the chance of winning a true lover was immensely increased if you removed

the yolk from an egg, filled it with salt, and ate it, shell and all, before going to bed——!

If Mary found herself back in the eighteenth century, whenever she talked with the gaffers and gammers, Michael and Primrose boldly adventured into the Middle Ages. Not far away, surrounded by an immense moat, stood Bodiam Castle, hardly to be reckoned as a ruin till you crossed the drawbridge and passed the outer walls, where jackdaws chattered at intruders. If you lingered on the ancient tilting-ground, and looked up and at the castle, it was easy to believe that it still belonged to Front de Bœuf. Micky made a reconstructive plan of the inside (with slight aid from Mitchie) which astonished Mary. Had she brought into the world an architect? The artful Mitchie, familiar with the noble fanes of France, held forth long and lucidly upon Beauty and Symbolism wrought in stone. She revealed to an excitable boy the wonders of his own Mount by the Sea, overlooking the champaign, so little changed during the centuries, which had given birth to William of Normandy. She presented him with a framed photograph of Saint Michiel de la Mer del Peril, standing upon a writhing Satan, holding aloft his sword, with the cock perched upon his foot.

"The great archangel," said Mitchie solemnly, "was the conqueror of Satan."

"He killed Satan——?"

"He couldn't do that. Let us say that he did what you must do—he killed the evil that was in himself."

"Golly!"

"Don't say 'Golly,' when I'm talking about saints. You are old enough to know that your mother has given you a name to be proud of, a name that you must try to justify."

"Why," asked Primrose, "does Saint Michael carry a cock upon his foot?"

"The cock stands for the brave chanticleer of France."

"Has there ever been a Saint Primrose?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Then I'm not like Micky; I'm not 'spected to do anything, am I?"

" You will do what you can ; nobody can do more."

" Anyway, my daddy was a real knight."

" Good ! Don't you forget that."

Happily, the little maid's recollections of her daddy were immaculate. She believed fondly that he had died doing his duty. Already, within one brief year, memory of him had grown dim. He had been a playmate—nothing more. She still spoke of him as a "lovely" man. A precisian suggested "lovable." Primrose preferred "lovely." It was pathetic to think that Sir Rupert, as a young man, had been both. It was tragic to contemplate a still distant day, when his child would learn the truth about his physical and mental degeneration.

### III

Mary's neighbours were neighbourly. The Laodicean parson, a sad proser in and out of his pulpit, "fussed," so Mitchie expressed it, over a microscope. Away from his beloved instrument, he appeared to look at life microscopically, profoundly interested in trifles, not a shining example to his parishioners. He could discourse learnedly about the archæology of Sussex and liked a glass of sound port. Mitchie corroborated what Mary had said about him as a preacher. It was obvious that the poor man had doubts and misgivings which disturbed his normal peace of mind. These leaked out of him. Mitchie enriched Mary's vocabulary with the word "pinguid." Superfluous moisture gathered upon a domed brow when the Rev. Edmund Hollywell addressed his congregation, but he didn't warm up internally. However, he could afford a curate. . . .

The curate, Oswald Winkworth, was cut to another pattern. Mary believed devoutly that Winky and Mitchie were "sent" to her. Perhaps they were.

Her mother had been a devout churchwoman of the old school, who believed in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and cherished anthropomorphic conceptions of the Deity. During the first twelve years of Mary's life, Mrs. Graves

had imparted to her child her views upon the Fall, Original Sin, and the Doctrine of the Atonement. Graves left "all that" to his wife. When she died he saw to it that Mary was prepared for Confirmation by a wise and kindly divine of his acquaintance, and, so to speak, "handed over" Mary to him for religious instruction. Mary never knew—nobody did—exactly what Graves *believed*. Probably, he had followed Huxley and other brilliant thinkers of the day up to the cross-roads between faith and unfaith. Certainly he repudiated Agnosticism. As certainly he had pieced together for himself a patternless mosaic of what he held to be good in all creeds, gently critical to the last of what he held to be human accretions. Young people demand more than that, and Graves was only too well aware of his disabilities as a teacher of religion. But, he hugged the conviction—now repudiated by our youth—that women, particularly young women, were the better, physically, mentally, and morally, if they held fast to the accepted creed of their time and country. Accordingly, he encouraged Mary in the faith sustaining her and snubbed ruthlessly any of his "novices" who attempted to tamper with that faith. . . .

Lynn's mind was objective. He believed in God as the Divine Essence permeating the Universe; he believed, as has been said, in a future life; he defined religion as the golden thread linking Heaven to Earth. But he, in his turn, respected Mary's faith in much that he, probably, refused to accept as "proven."

The Rev. Edmund Hollywell, as appraised by Mary, may be left in peace, a comical disappointment to an ardent mother. She had hoped that he might be persuaded to teach Micky Latin; she had too an uneasy conviction that Micky, sooner or later, would become a persistent note of interrogation upon matters that a boy might shrink from discussing with a woman. Mr. Hollywell, she guessed, would break into a profuse perspiration if Micky tackled him!

His curate inspired greater confidence. Winky was young, up-to-date, enough of a scholar to teach Latin

grammar, and a " live wire." He had not too much to " do " in a small parish ; he was willing and eager to supplement his tiny income. Finally it was arranged that Winky should come to the manor-house three times a week, and devote two hours to Micky. Together they read Cæsar's *De Bello Gallico* and cultivated Latin Prose composition. In the afternoon they might go " ratting " in each other's company. If Lynn had been alive, there is no doubt that he would have expressed himself as satisfied with the progress that his little son was making. . . .

The other neighbours took a friendly interest in Mary and her affairs. She refused to dine out, because she had no wish to give dinners in return. Luncheons and teas were another matter. Nevertheless, all said and done, she knew well enough that she, for Michael's sake, was living in the Land of Nod, in self-imposed exile. There were moments when she rebelled ; there were other moments when both she and Mitchie envisaged themselves as fat weeds on Lethe's wharf. . . .

Nearly all of Mary's neighbours took for granted that Micky *must* be sent to a public-school. They pointed out that the boy would be heavily " handicapped " if he didn't go to a good preparatory school *soon*.

" You can't keep him at home indefinitely," they chorussed.

With these well-meaning Arcadians, Mitchie was not at her best. She couldn't resist the temptation to sharpen her wits at their expense.

" What *is* education ? " she would ask.

The wife of a squireen might then reply tartly :

" Really, Miss Mitchell, I'm not prepared to answer such a big question off-hand."

" Possibly not. Because the question *is* colossal, it exacts an answer. It may be easier to say what education *isn't*."

" Pray tell me what it is and what it *isn't*."

Mitchie never refused such challenges. But her attitude towards ignorance in any form was too aggressive. Even Micky, who possessed alert ears when he obeyed the

Victorian injunction to be seen and not heard, would say to Mary after her visitors had gone : " Mitchie talks as you think, doesn't she, Mum ? " And then Mary would have to admit that on occasion this was true.

Mitchie made it distressingly plain that education was cultivation of the mind, feelings, and manners. It was not, save in its narrowest sense, a mere study of textbooks. Education, in fine, was an interminable process from darkness into light, the supreme Art of Life as life should be lived.

In East Sussex, when Mitchie valiantly attempted to cope with what she held to be ignorance, ignorance would murmur politely :

" Really ? What you say is *most* interesting, but you must admit, Miss Mitchell, that our public school system has made our Empire what it is ? "

" I contend that it hasn't made it what it might be."

Alone with their squires, amiable ladies, each in her own fashion, would affirm that Miss Mitchell was not *persona grata* to them. Mary, for her part, respected Mitchie before she came to love her. She could love Winky and leave respect to win recognition later on. Winky fell back on quotation, not the least of his parts of speech, when he spoke of Mary :

" A noble woman, nobly planned," or, " O perfect woman!" Micky became alarmed.

" Mum, is Winky falling in love with you ? "

" I hope so."

" Mum——! "

" Winky, my son, is a jolly boy. I can't help loving him, and it would be dreadful if he didn't love me. We want all the love we can honestly come by. Of course I know what you mean, and I couldn't resist teasing you." She paused for an instant, before she added with impressive dignity : " You are old enough to know this—no man will *ever* take your father's place. As for Winky," she laughed lightly, " everybody in the parish, except you apparently, knows that he has fallen in love with a young lady whom you have not yet met."

Greatly relieved, Micky hugged her, excusing himself :  
“ I—I thought he wanted to marry you, because he talks poetry about you.”

“ Bless him ! ” said Mary. “ I hope that he talks prose to her. I have told you an open secret to cheer you up. Not a word to Winky ! ”

Micky promised to be discreet.

#### IV

There is not much to record about Primrose. Mrs. Graves would have described her as a good, obedient little girl. Country air and food agreed with her, but she remained a sensitive plant, exacting constant attention from all about her, including Micky.

“ She gets her way, because she has a way,” declared Mitchie.

This was the “ appealing ” way, so dear to the strong men of pre-war novels. To-day, women, not men, speak disdainfully of coaxers and wheedlers. But these dainty, rather helpless creatures continue to sow, and to reap what no doubt they deem to be their reward.

Primrose, so Mary feared rather than hoped, might bloom into a beauty. She had inherited delicate features from both her parents, her mother’s lovely colouring, and some of her father’s brains. Fortunately, she was as yet innocently unconscious of her good looks. The servants adored her and spoiled her. She had a “ strangle hold ” on Aunt Felicia and the cousins—and in a funny, disarming way peculiarly her own *she knew it*. Mitchie said solemnly :

“ That child has an inordinate appetite for love.”

“ Inordinate—? ”

“ Why, yes. One can do nothing.”

“ But does one want to do anything ? ”

Then Mitchie would hold forth eloquently, making a visible impression upon Mary, whose mind often felt “ dented ” after Mitchie’s vigorous assaults. According to this indurated spinster, whose heart—so Mary was

beginning to discover—was not hard or small, people who demanded love in excess should be prepared to give love unstintingly. The eternal question, which must have been asked first in the Garden of Eden : *Is it better to love or be loved?* had been answered by Christ. In a sense He had come to earth, whether as God or Man, to proclaim the new gospel of loving, even to the extent of loving His enemies. He hated sin ; He loved sinners. Mitchie could embroider such a theme delicately, avoiding platitudes. In her mouth the eternal verities assumed a new significance, new at any rate to Mary. Mitchie contended that an inordinate appetite for love was pagan and manifested itself in a pagan way. A pagan to Mitchie was a heathenish and ungodly person. The “getters” and “grabbers” were pagans, the “givers” were Christians, Christ-like even if they had never heard of Christ. . . .

Primrose, therefore, must be labelled for the moment as pagan.

“What a name for such a mite ! ” exclaimed the maternal Mary.

“I ask myself, and you, is she capable of deep feeling ? I don’t know ; I hope for the best.”

“She’s a dear, good little thing.”

“A kitten, unconscious of her claws. When she finds out that she has claws, will she use them ? ”

“*Qui vivra, verra.*”

“Just so—an unknown quantity. Now Micky——”

Her voice softened as she paused.

“Is Micky pagan ? ” asked Mary.

“Emphatically—no. I’m very pleased with Micky ; he arouses and satisfies expectation. What a blessed thing it is that he outgrew his strength, although that is a silly phrase.”

“In what sense ? ”

“We never outgrow our real strength. A slight physical breakdown may mean, it often does, a mental and moral progress impossible to compute. I pray that the boy may not become too robust too soon.”

“You surprise me, Mitchie.”

"I surprise myself. I may have a gift which I regard as a special grace. I am honest with myself. Self-deception is so childish—to believe what we want to believe! Bah! I have acquired the habit of distrusting the preconceived idea. I can't take people as I would like them to be; I have no faith in face values, in misleading appearances, particularly in my dealings with my own sex."

"Ah!"

"You laugh, Mrs. Lynn; and I laugh with you. I can promise you that I shall not make a 'favourite' of Micky; but I repeat—I am very pleased with him."

V

When Spring came dancing into East Sussex and the elms in the garden began to blush at her caperings, a certain misgiving assailed Mary. She had a woman's fear of what she did not understand. The word "psychic" conveyed little or nothing to her. She had never met a "psychic." She had heard, of course, of Madame Blavatzky; she had "dipped" into two books written by Mr. Sinnett; but her father and her clever London friends, if they touched at all upon what was then considered esoteric and "uncanny," did so with amused tolerance for the "crankiness" of others, presumably immune themselves from speculations which they ruled out of court as untenable and unproven. All stout Edwardians more or less satisfied with existing conditions were material in their views and agnostic concerning anything beyond their powers of vision. From the august person of the greatest Personage in the Realm radiated comfort and security. He was the most genial of monarchs. He took lightly duties which assuredly were not light to him, as was found out afterwards. His loyal subjects, freed from Victorian restrictions, sang "God save the king" with grateful fervour. He raised from the dead in one too brief decade Merrie England. Nobody could speak of him as "psychic."

Mitchie, cool and dispassionate critic of her pupils,

alarmed Mary by applying this noun or adjective to Primrose.

“ She is—what ? ”

“ Psychic.”

“ What do you mean by that ? ”

A precisian replied :

“ For my own purpose I quote Professor William James : ‘ A rapid, premonitory perspective view of schemes of thought not yet articulate.’ ”

“ Gracious—! You must let that soak in. It can’t be possible that a child not yet eleven can have any view of thoughts not yet articulate ? ”

“ Of course she can. Children’s thoughts are never articulate. When they happen to stray out of childish bounds they are amorphous.”

“ You use such words.”

“ I use the right words ; I collect words. Daily I enlarge my vocabulary. Primrose cannot control her thoughts ; and often, so I have just found out, they take the form of premonitions. To me this is not only intensely interesting, but it calls for combined action from us——”

“ Premonitions ? Of what ? ”

“ Of coming events——”

“ You tell me that the child is *clairvoyante* ? ”

“ She may be. I admit with shame that I am ignorant of nearly everything that comes under the head of psychology. I know far less than you do about physiology and pathology. This child has odd intuitions. I was trained by my father, and so were you, to use my reason. I have to reason upon what may seem unreasonable. But intuition is a feminine attribute, a sense, I suppose, of direction, such as birds have. Do unfledged warblers dream of the tundra ? Do they think objectively of the immense distances they have to travel ? Nobody can answer such questions. It is possible that they do. You and I can’t ‘ pump ’ information out of Primrose. She prattles away to Micky. I suggest that you do ‘ pump ’ Micky. The little I know I have discreetly squeezed out of him.”

Micky, never a sealed fountain, was easily “ pumped.”

"Prim," he said, "tells me everything. Winky says that a man must never give away a woman."

"He said that, did he? Well, I'm not asking you to tell secrets. Just between our two selves I'm a wee bit worried about Primmy. She's rather delicate. Are you old enough to know that the body affects the mind, and 'tother way about?"

"Yes; I know that."

"And so, in a way, we have to take care of our thoughts, *watch them.*"

He nodded.

"Prim has rum thoughts—and dreams. She says that her dreams come true. Such tommyrot!"

"It isn't tommyrot."

"Winky says that dreams go by contraries. If you dream of a funeral, you'll have a wedding."

"Does Winky believe in dreams?"

"He did dream of a funeral, and he thinks there may be a wedding. Naomi believes in telling fortunes. I suppose Naomi is a silly ass, but she talks a lot with Prim."

"And with you too?"

"You bet."

"I like you to talk with all and sundry, Micky, but silly talk is bad."

"I know, Naomi really believes in witches and ghosts and fairies—"

Evidently Naomi had imposed her beliefs upon Primrose—a triumph for ignorance. Why did ignorance triumph? O Ignorance, what crimes are committed in thy name!

Prompt and joint action by Mary and Mitchie unpicked some of Naomi's stitches, not all. Unlike Micky Primrose kept secret her own thoughts, afraid possibly of ridicule, that fearsome weapon of Olympians.

Eventually Mary decided that she was a "sensitive," abnormally impressionable. Mitchie summed up the situation:

"That child must be saved from herself."

Not an easy thing to do. Perhaps of all tasks set to and

by teachers the most difficult and exasperating. Like may cure like. There is great virtue in the homeopathic treatment of character and temperament. Most mothers and fathers instinctively wince when their own defects reproduce themselves in their children. Then they set to work to change or at least modify them. Selfish women train children to be unselfish, although selfishness, perhaps, is an object lesson in itself. A drunkard puts the fear of strong drink into his boys.

This Spring, so happy and free from care in other ways, brought to Mary Lynn a full sense of her responsibilities in taking upon herself the guardianship of a child not even distantly of kin to her. In mean streets, she had learned much about children's bodies ; she had not had time to study their minds. It was amazing to discover that babies, hardly weaned, had minds. . . . Crawlers on the floor of the *crèche*, meticulously safeguarded, managed now and again to crawl into mischief. . . . In their own tiny world some infants exercised dominance over others. Each knew what he or she—*wanted* !

## VI

The promised canoe was gloriously launched upon the muddy waters of Rother in May. Disaster followed. History repeated itself. Without a warning word to his mother or Mitchie, Micky conceived the idea of paddling to Rye. He quite forgot that he would have to paddle back against a slow but obstinate current. He was not yet allowed to sail his small craft.

His absence at schoolroom tea provoked nothing more than comment. Finally Primrose spoke an enlightening word.

“Micky wanted to go to Rye.”

Mitchie hastened to Mary, who, in her turn, hastened to the gardener. The three took the path by the river in search of the truant. He was found many miles from home, completely exhausted after a futile attempt to tow the canoe

back to Frodsham. Wind and current had "done him in." To make matters infinitely worse, he was drenched to the skin.

Mary left the canoe with a friendly farmer, who drove Micky and the ladies back to the manor house. Micky was put to bed and a doctor summoned. Before forty-eight anxious hours had passed, he took Mary aside. Exposure after extreme fatigue had done its work.

"It's pneumonia," he said gravely. "And both lungs are congested."

That night, as Mary was tucking the child into bed, Primrose wailed out confession :

"I dared him to do it."

## CHAPTER VI

### MICKY TAKES THE LOW GROUND

#### I

**M**ICKY nearly died. At the crisis of the disease, he had an experience which inspired in him something which took definite form—form and *colour*. Who shall say what colours lives? How often it is some trifling incident, or accident. . . .

A trained nurse from London was in attendance; her patient, so she believed, was unconscious. The doctor must have thought so too. He happened to be a hard-working and overworked G.P. He knew that Mary was waiting in the passage outside the sick-room; he could not say what he thought before her. . . .

Micky returned to semi-consciousness at the moment when the doctor whispered to the nurse his conviction that the boy was sinking. He did not pick his words. They floated to Micky's ears as if from an immense distance:

"We have done all that is possible. I have not the heart to tell his mother; but he will die quietly, probably in a few hours. There is no vitality left. A man might pull through from sheer will to live. A child cannot exercise that will."

The nurse whispered back:

"I know—I know."

The doctor went out of the room; the nurse sat down. Micky heard a strangled sob.

Suddenly his mind cleared. He recalled the moment when he had been run over years before and his conviction that he must die, the punishment of disobedience. The thought of death had not frightened him then. It was otherwise now. And yet, dominating fear of death, was the

acute sense of what his death would mean to his mother. Even the doctor dared not tell HER. . . .

The will to live stirred in him. He thought to himself : " I won't die ; I mustn't die ; Mum wants me." He repeated this again and again. He knew that the nurse was crying . . . and in the passage the doctor was talking to his mother. . . . Presently she would come in. . . . Then he would open his eyes, and tell her that he was quite all right. . . .

This satisfaction was denied him. When Mary did come in, he had drifted into sleep.

He learned afterwards that this sleep had been the turning-point of the disease. Mary told him :

" Nurse and I found you asleep ; you were sleeping like a child. I wasn't surprised, but she was. I didn't know ; she did. The doctor was the most surprised of all, when he heard about it. He thought that you were going."

" Yes ; I heard him say so."

" What——!"

" I heard him, Mum. And I remember that I wanted to tell you not to worry. I wanted to bet a bob with the doctor that I should live."

" You must have dreamed this, my son."

" No. You ask nurse. The doctor said : ' He will *die*' ; and he said he couldn't tell you."

When the nurse confirmed this, Mary was deeply moved, unable to speak. A Hand had been stretched out to save. . . . She went to her room and fell upon her knees in a passion of awe and gratitude. She believed that Omnipotence had spared her and her boy. Had he been taken, faith in God would have crumbled. *That she knew.* Such knowledge had come to her on the eve of the crisis, when she found herself unable to think, unable to pray, distraught with misery and apprehension. During those bitter hours, she had been face to face with herself, able to see herself with strange detachment ; she had turned from Mitchie and Primrose ; she had hated Primrose as the innocent cause of the catastrophe ; she had suffered again the pangs of childbirth, the interminable travailings which had ended

in joy when her son was born, which must end in such unthinkable pain and desolation if he died. The unborn son had made the father's death supportable. . . .

The effect upon Micky, a boy of twelve, was cumulative. Too young to analyse his feelings, he was only conscious at first that a new, delightful zest in life had come back to him. *Bacon was delicious*; all his senses were quickened; he could lie upon his back in bed listening to the fluting of the warblers in the garden, the tinkle of the fountain, and the bleating of sheep in the water meadows; through the widely-opened windows, wafted by June zephyrs, came the fragrance of roses and syringa; his eyes dwelt with new interest and pleasure upon the dappled skies, the cloud-forms, or the serene, ineffable blue. . . .

His soul sang within him. How good, how wonderful, was life!

The reverse of the medal must be indicated. When he left his bed, he suffered (being a boy) from the humiliating effects of extreme weakness. Without provocation he burst into tears. He cried when the local barber tweaked his hair whilst cutting it; he cried when he felt tired, as a baby does. . . .

Mary, however, consoled him, laughing at his tears.

She, possibly, in her own way (purged of sentimentality) made him realise the incalculable power of the human will. She made him understand in the simplest words that the human will was inseparable from the divine Will. God had helped him to help himself; she made it plain that there must be co-operation between God and Man, that, underlying human endeavour, this link between the finite and the Infinite, whether strong or weak, must be recognised and reverentially acclaimed. . . .

Perhaps his sense of the colour and rhythm of life came from her.

## II

Before Micky left his bed, and throughout the long period of convalescence, Primrose was sweet to him, a tiny

ministering angel. Before the crisis, racked by fever, he had provoked slight jealousy in Mary, because he had expressed a wish to kiss the child's cool cheeks. Mary's lips and cheeks were not cool. When the crisis passed, Primrose lay beside him, clutching him, entreating forgiveness.

" If you'd died, Micky, I should have died too."

" Shut up ! What rot ! "

" I should have drowned myself in the Rother. That's a secret."

" All right. If you like being eaten by eels !—Girls say what they don't mean."

" Perhaps they do ; I don't care. You know that I love you more than anything or anybody, don't you ? "

" You ought to love Mum much harder than you love me."

" Well, I don't. I couldn't love any grown-up as I love you. It's heavenly to think I'm not your real sister."

" Why ? "

" Because I can marry you some day."

" You *are* a silly ass."

" You're the sweetest boy in the world."

" Look here, Prim ; I haven't asked you to marry me, have I ? "

" N-no ; you haven't—yet."

She gazed at him sorrowfully, thinking of a boy and girl marriage in *The Oak Staircase*, a romance dealing with Judge Jeffreys and the fair maids of Taunton, read aloud by Mary.

" It isn't Leap Year either."

" N-no—still—"

" Naomi has been walking out with her young man for three years, and they aren't even engaged."

" I say they ought to be, and so does Naomi."

Micky, although a *preux chevalier*, stoutly refused to plight troth with his fayre lady, but, secretly, he was " bucked."

## III

The outstanding result of his illness assumed a negative form. He was *not* as other boys. A London specialist made that plain to Mary. He might become a robust man. There was no organic disease of the heart, but it remained a weak spot. As before, country air was prescribed. He must stroll, as the placid Pecksniff strolled, to high health. No violent exercise—no straining of mind or body. Let an anxious (and sensible) mother pin faith to the *vis medicatrix naturæ*.

It came to this : Micky must be educated at home.

Mary was unable to determine whether or not the verdict of Authority pleased her. Had Micky been able to go to a preparatory school, *en route* for Winchester, she would have returned with Primrose and Mitchie to Kensington Square. Resolutely she put from her the lure of London. Because it was a lure, she may have acted too hastily, spurred to action by necessity. She sold the London house and bought Frodsham Old Manor. Mitchie, doubtless, had a word to say about that, but she did not say it. Mary sold her own property well, and got the manor cheap, so she was assured by her solicitors. Her clever friends, whilst deplored her enforced separation from them, declared that she would have "tremendous fun" doing up her new house that was so delightfully old. Had she been interested in "things," this might have been so ; but her interest in persons remained paramount. At the sale of the Sheepshanks' furniture, she bought a few good "pieces," but sucked far more pleasure out of the transference of her books and prints to Frodsham. Felicia wrote : "Now you belong to the landed gentry," to which Mary replied : "I do feel—*landed*." She meant that she was "landed" with Micky's education ; she couldn't "see" him tied to two women for at least five years. . . .

Mitchie, to be sure, "stood by," Mrs. Lynn had become "Mary"—a friend and almost a sister. Together they talked interminably about the next five years. Would Micky degenerate into a mother's darling, an insufferable

prig? Could they measure losses against gains and strike a balance? Winky was summoned to join a Council of Three. He admitted regretfully that he was not too sanguine concerning the great experiment. He had been licked into shape at school.

"Licked?" queried Mary.

"You know what I mean—"

"Not quite."

Winky waxed autobiographical. He had been "licked" by prefects, and "swished" by a present bishop. As a "fag" he had been "kicked."

"It did me a power of good, Mrs. Lynn."

"Didn't it harden you?"

"No. The big thing about a public school is that it is a miniature world—"

"Microcosm," suggested Mitchie.

"Thank you, Miss Mitchell. Yes. I didn't distinguish myself at work or play. I was—and I suppose I am—a bit of a rabbit. I learned at school what I should never have learned at home: that we can't all be 'bloods'."

He had to explain to Mitchie what he meant by "bloods." What else he said need not be recorded. He was an echo of what every loyal public-school man says and thinks. Obviously he, for his part, believed that Micky was to be pitied. When he went his cheerful way, after promising to make the best of a bad business, he left that impression behind him. Alone with Mary, Mitchie observed:

"All has not been said."

"You can say what you think to me."

"I can. And why? Because my thoughts are governed. I sometimes think that if we could read each other's thoughts, this world would be easier to live in. We should see ourselves as others see us. We should lick our thoughts into shape, as Mr. Winkworth would put it, make them presentable. My thoughts are at your service. . . . Now, let us collogue. You are relieved of one responsibility. *Michael can't go to school.* Good! The weakness that I deplore most in my own sex is their childish determination to have it both ways. I express myself colloquially. Even you,

sensible woman that you are, have been torn in two between your desire to ‘mother’ Michael and your conviction—only, mark you, a preconceived idea—that he ought to be sent to school. At school, he would have drifted away from your influence. You would have struggled desperately to keep in touch with him ; you would have tried to have it both ways. Now—you have it one way, and the one way is your way. We two women have to father a boy. Most exciting ! Personally speaking, I feel thrilled. I am rising to a moral exigency. I want to justify the confidence you have placed in me. Apart from that I am burning to help as a fellow-woman, with nearly all the men arrayed against us. Mr. Winkworth, most inadequately and unconvincingly, has presented the common view. He is a good fellow, he will do what he can, but, to use his word, he is a—rabbit.”

“ He has been licked into shape.”

“ I cannot form any opinion on that. I am positive that Michael is no ordinary boy ; I am equally positive that school life, if he is debarred from taking part in games, might turn him into a rabbit.”

“ He will be heavily handicapped in his choice of a profession—”

“ Name the profession. Ah ! You can’t. Who can ? Soldier, sailor, barrister ? I can’t see him as any one of these. He may inherit aptitudes for Letters, or Science, or Art. And if he has such aptitudes, they, so I believe, can be encouraged and developed better by us.”

“ Dear Mitchie, you put heart into me.”

#### IV

One other result of Micky’s illness must be set down. Mary discontinued her visits to the *crèche*, but not her financial grants in aid. Together with the manor house, its garden, and fields, were a few cottages too picturesque to be pulled down which had to be made sanitary and habitable. These and many small parochial matters engrossed Mary’s leisure. She told herself, despairingly,

that she would never become a countrywoman. The rural mind amused and provoked her. The rustics seemed to be only shrewd where their own interests were concerned. She had bridged the gulf between herself and mothers in mean streets, but her cottagers were sticklers for rites duly observed in dealings with the "quality." Mitchie approved of this, saying sharply : " You can't understand them, why should you expect them to understand you ? " Mitchie spoke of Mary as a lady of Great Expectations, which was accepted by the children as a family joke. They had another joke, " high ground." The manor house was situate half way up a hill. On the top of the hill lay down-land, and, on fine days, when visibility was good, a glimpse might be got of the Channel. This stretch of down became Mitchie's *promenade*. She would say : " Let us take the high ground." She contended that the west wind blew cobwebs out of the mind. Being a lover of phrases, she used " high ground " metaphorically. In the present year of grace, her pupils might have called their governess a highbrow. They were constantly invited to take the high ground, even when they sat at tea in the schoolroom. Views, according to Mitchie, should be panoramic. Primrose said boldly : " You hate the water meadows 'cos of the cows."

" Because of the cows, please. Drop baby talk. I prefer to look at a cow from a distance."

" You like the downs because there are only sheep."

" True ! Sheep do not distract my attention from objects more worthy of notice."

" I'm not high-groundy," declared Primrose. " I like the ponds in the garden and the cosy nooks ; I love mucking about with Micky in the chicken yard."

" Please keep those expressions for the chicken yard. Are you aware that you have a pretty mouth ? "

" You bet she is," chuckled Micky.

" Then be careful not to let ugly words drop out of it."

Nevertheless, despite such admonitions, Mitchie had inspired love in her pupils. Her rare smiles delighted them. She knew when and how to unbend ; whatever she taught excited interest, simply because she was en-

thusiastic about high endeavour. She would have been at her worst with dull children. Both Micky and Primrose had imagination. In Primrose it was, perhaps, too lively. She insisted upon believing in her dreams ; she affirmed that she had dreamed of Micky's illness. She believed also that she had almost seen a gnome sitting upon a toad-stool——!

Meanwhile, the chicken business had collapsed into bankruptcy. For a season the concern flourished. Mary bought eggs and fowls for the table, paying spot cash. But when the local miller presented (too tardily) his terrible bill for "feed," there was no cash left to meet it. Mary paid up, under protest. And then, with appalling unexpectedness, cholera despatched all the laying hens to the place where the good chickens go. They were cremated by the gardener. Primrose wept. Micky said consolingly : "Let's try rabbits." But Primrose sobbed out : " Could we eat our own bunny-rabbits ? Never ! "

A chastening experience !

## V

Human nature is so adaptable that Mary came in time to the conclusion, even if it were factitious, that Arcadia had its beatitudes for her. A glow tingled through her tissues when Felicia spoke with cumulative enthusiasm of the amazing change in Primrose.

" She looks a different child."

" Thanks."

" She has 'furnished up'."

Mary, unfamiliar with stable-talk, grasped what Felicia meant. " Furnished up " was distinctly good. A sometime follower of the hounds was speaking of the firm flesh on the child's ribs ; Mary thought that she was alluding to mental equipment. She realised that she had not quite grasped the exact meaning of a new expression when Felicia continued :

" I never thought her clever ; she is. My children,

older than she is, frankly admit her cleverness. I am delighted. You have triumphed, Mary, and I should have failed. Cleverness means so much to a woman."

"Don't say that to Mitchie."

"Why ever not?"

"She distrusts cleverness—and so do I. Well, I have attended to the child's body, and Mitchie has dealt faithfully and patiently with her mind. Tell me, was her mother or her father what is called to-day—psychic?"

"Do you mean—spooky?"

"Call it that, if you like. There is a vein of spookiness in Prim, which I don't encourage. There is nothing of the sort in me or Mitchie. I wondered if it might be inherited."

"Odd that you should have asked such a question! Odd too that it should come out in the child. Yes; Rupert was what we called—spooky. He had the gift, if it is a gift, of automatic writing. But he hated to do it; he said that it hurt him. And I happen to know that it did, because I saw him at it once. Very stupidly I laughed, which annoyed him. I remember exactly what happened. He sat at a table with several sheets of paper in front of him and about a dozen pencils. He seemed to me to go into a sort of trance. Then he began to write like a madman, and not in his own handwriting, which was very neat and legible. He smashed the points off half the pencils. What he wrote concerned a man who was with us at the time. A message came through for him. I can swear to this, Mary: the message, which I have forgotten, was unpleasant; I couldn't make much of it, but the man to whom it was sent accepted it. I was really rather frightened, and that is why I laughed. Dolly laughed too. *That tore it.* Rupert lost his hair. But one thing I recall vividly; he hurt his hand and elbow. There was no humbug about that——"

"You can tell me nothing more?"

"Only this: I apologised to Rupert next day, and he was charming but reserved. He loathed ridicule. He told me, quite frankly, that this spooky side of him came from his mother. She was Scotch, one of the McFloys of Faick——"

"Prim's grandmother."

"Yes ; she died young. According to Rupert she had the gift of second sight, but the family didn't like that mentioned."

"*Clairvoyance*——?"

"I suppose so."

Mary said slowly :

"Keep this to yourself, Felicia——"

"Why, of course——"

"Primrose says that she dreamed of Micky's illness about a week before he fell ill."

"You don't say so!"

"She has told Micky, not me, that some of her dreams come true. *How many don't?* I haven't gone into that with her yet ; I may have to do so. You see I have never poked my nose into matters beyond my ken. I neither believe nor disbelieve in *clairvoyance*, for instance. I hesitate to tell you something else, trivial in itself, but not quite trivial when taken with what has gone before. A month or two ago, I was expecting a week-end visit from one of my friends, the last sort of person to put one off at the last moment. I had told the children about her, nothing much, but enough perhaps to appeal to their little imaginations. I was putting flowers in her room on the morning of the day I was expecting her. Prim was helping me. I daresay I fussed a bit. Anyway Prim told me that she wasn't coming."

"And she did?"

"And she didn't——! At luncheon I got a wire saying that she couldn't come. I expected a note of triumph from Prim, but she said nothing, just as if her tiny prediction had never been made. I held my tongue ; I was tempted to speak to Mitchie about it, but somehow I didn't. I had to tell you."

Felicia smiled uneasily, shrugging her slender shoulders.

"I—I don't know what to say——"

"I don't know what to do. I shall mark time. It is a comforting fact to me that Prim is growing plump. She sleeps sound o' nights ; she has a healthy appetite for her food and her lessons, so I refuse to worry."

"You are always so sensible, Mary."

"Sensible, perhaps, but not sensitive. The child is too sensitive ; she may outgrow that ; I—I hope so."

She changed the subject.

## VI

Another winter passed uneventfully. To Mary East Sussex ceased to be the Land of Nod, although she admitted to Mitchie (who felt as she did) that she might remain in the country for the rest of her life, but not *of it*.

Both women saw the "comic" side of a very serious attempt to "father" a boy under petticoat government. It was difficult, but not unamusing, to cope with boyish escapades. Primrose gleefully followed her sworn knight into mischief, but on one memorable occasion, Micky thoughtfully left her out of an audacious enterprise. He had been recently introduced to Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, characters not likely to appeal to Primrose, now on nodding terms with that noble and puissant prince, the Marquess of Esmond. Mary and Primrose stood shoulder to shoulder as staunch adherents of Thackeray against Mitchie and Micky who, as staunchly, espoused the claims of Dickens. Civil war raged. In one camp Mary read *Esmond* aloud to Primrose ; in the other Mitchie gave inimitable imitations of Sam Weller's Cockney accent. . . .

It has been mentioned that Mary never dined out or gave dinners ; but there was one exception to the rule. Now and again, as lady of the small manor, she entertained, and was entertained by, the parson and his wife. On such rare occasions Mitchie "assisted."

Saturated with Pickwickian philosophy, Micky sat down to enjoy, as that great Man did, the soothing influences of Bacchus. His most precious possession after his father's sword was a finely coloured meerschaum pipe which had belonged to Major Lynn. Out of his friend, the gardener (whose compliance may be reckoned indefensible), he coaxed a plug of black tobacco strong enough to blow the head off a mule.

As soon as the coast was clear, five minutes after Mary and Mitchie had rumbled off in the village fly, when Primrose was upstairs with Nurse, Micky made a raid on the sideboard. He secured a bottle of brandy ; he had no difficulty in coaxing out of Cook a lemon, some lump sugar, and a jug of boiling water. She supposed, good woman, that Master Michael was going to mix for himself a hot lemonade, an excellent nightcap of a winter's evening. . . .

He dared not smoke either in his bedroom or in the drawing-room, but a fire still smouldered in the dining-room. Nobody would enter that till the next morning. If he opened wide the windows, tell-tale fumes would escape. Already Primrose and he had smoked brown-paper cigarettes without any abiding sense of satisfaction. . . .

He placed an armchair near the fire, mixed a jorum of punch, filled his pipe, lighted it, opened *Pickwick*, and chucklingly read as follows :

“ Mr. Pickwick accompanied them to the White Hart, and having soothed his feelings with something hot, went to bed, and to sleep, almost simultaneously. . . .”

Micky sipped his toddy, which was not too strong, but strong enough for him. He read other passages in the famous book that dealt with conviviality—previously marked. As he read, he sipped and smoked, stretching out his legs, warming his toes and his heart. To get satisfying results he had to suck hard at the pipe. He told himself that this was the greatest moment of his life. He had assumed the *toga virilis* ! It was true that hot brandy and water even with the agreeable addition of lemon and sugar was not so pleasing to the palate as shandy-gaff, but punch was Pickwickian tipple. Tony Weller had a word in favour of pine-apple punch. That might be tried later. . . .

For a blissful five minutes, Micky's feelings were soothed miraculously. A Scot once expressed himself : “ I thocht I was floating in Heeven,” as he too sipped his toddy, smoked his pipe, and listened to four and twenty pipers all playing different tunes. . . .

Suddenly, it seemed to Micky, who had never heard of this Scot, that he was floating, not in Heaven, but on

troubled waters. Laying down book, pipe, and glass, he staggered to his feet. Like Mr. Pickwick, he wished to go to bed, and to sleep, but something told him that this was not to be. He found himself bathed in a profuse and cold perspiration. . . .

At this moment Nurse entered the room !

She had served no apprenticeship on a steam-packet between Dover and Calais, but she knew what to do and did it. Afterwards she said to Mary : " I've never seen my pore old father half as drunk as Master Micky was, M'm ; and I'll say this for Dad he could *hold* his liquor——!" Indeed, Micky's condition was alarming. He had to cast up his accounts with Nicotina. *She* had poisoned him. . . .

For twenty-four hours he lay in bed. Mary held that his punishment fitted the crime. When Micky was himself and abjectly ashamed, she said quietly :

" I don't think you'll do it again."

## VII

Next day, Miss Primrose, assuming Mitchie's mantle, took the " high ground." Naomi with embellishments of her own, had told the shocking story ; Naomi, from personal experience, could speak with convincing eloquence upon the Demon—Drink. She thanked her Maker that her Tom was teetotal ; she declared that she would never marry a drunkard—" no, not if it was never so."

Primrose solemnly rebuked her knight.

" You made a filthy beast of yourself."

In his robust moments, Micky would have shivered a lance with her ; but he was not feeling robust, far from it. Humbly as Uriah Heep, he replied feebly :

" Rightie O ! "

" But it isn't ' Rightie O ' . "

" It isn't your business anyway."

" Yes ; it is. I—I couldn't marry a drunkard not—not if it were never so. *There !*"

Micky's humour stirred within him.

"Have you been jawing about me with Naomi?"

"Everybody in the house and out of it jolly well knows that you were drunk—drunk and disorderly. You might be sent to prison——!"

"Hop off it!"

"You are no longer my knight. I'm wondering what Saint Michael would say about it. Proberbubly, he knows."

"Can you spell proberbubly?"

Primrose dissolved into tears.

"You m-m-mock at me! You—you *are* a filthy beast."

She ran away from him, hoping, perhaps, that he would follow her. He didn't. He bolted, hot-foot, to Winky. Ardent Prohibitionists will be shocked to hear that Winky, a clerk in Holy Orders, laughed Homerically.

"You got tight, what?"

"Yes; but I didn't mean to, Winky. Honest Injun!"

"It's about the best thing that could have happened."

"Winky——!"

"I wish it had happened to me when I was your age."

"Why?"

"It did happen later, when I was old enough to know better. You got tight by accident; I got tight by design. The result appears to be the same in both cases. Once bit, twice shy."

Micky tried to digest this. It occurred to him that men, even clergymen, were towers of strength to other men.

"Prim says I could be sent to prison; she got that from one of the maids. Could I?"

"If you were haled before a J.P., I think, under all the circumstances, you might be let off with a fine. First offence, Micky."

"I'll take my Sam it's going to be the last."

Dr. Watts might have improved the shining hour with moral platitudes. Winky hesitated, and laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"I shall think the better of you for this, old chap, if you keep that sound resolution."

"Winky, did Charles Dickens ever get tight?"

" Not to my personal knowledge."

" But Mr. Pickwick did."

" Not—a—designedly."

" The rummy thing is that nothing *awful* happened to him."

" Have you read *Bleak House* ? "

" Not yet."

" In *Bleak House* Dickens introduces a dreadful old man, gin-sodden, so saturated with spirits, so corrupt in body, that he dies a terrible death, too terrible to describe to you, the most terrible of all the deaths that can be died. Those are Dickens's own words. I shall never forget them."

" Nor shall I," declared Micky.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE OBLIGATORY SCENE

#### I

WHEN Mary discovered two innocents clasped in each other's arms, she was constrained to take joint action with Nurse in regard to what Victorian mothers of quality termed *les convenances*. She achieved the not too easy task of making it plain to a little girl, without provoking inopportune questions, that the mysteries of a young lady's *toilette* must not be profaned by the presence of a male, and further that sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. Both children grasped the fact that dressing or undressing in the presence of the other was not "nice," that certain intimate garments, although they might flutter together on a clothes' line in full view of the public eye, were, when worn, to be kept more or less out of sight. Both Micky and Primrose accepted this as an injunction from Authority on all fours with another inscrutable decree: "You mustn't eat butter with bacon." They were not yet able to understand why such restrictions were enforced; they were cheered and solaced by the assurance that they would understand later on. Occasionally Mitchie imposed "lines" upon her pupils. They had to write out, in copper-plate round-hand: "Obedience is necessary to Success." The son of a soldier accepted this *dictum*; Primrose was not quite sure about it. Still, obedience was made easy for them. The underlying reasons which justified *les convenances* escaped the mirthful pair. As proof of this, it must be recorded that shortly after Mitchie's enthronement in the schoolroom, hearing shouts of laughter coming from the long corridor at an hour when she supposed both children to be asleep,

she sallied forth to find her pupils playing hide-and-seek with absolutely nothing "on" !

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked majestically.

They stood before her unabashed. Mitchie's rare smile twinkled. It happened to be a warm night; no danger to be apprehended of catching cold. Mary was reading in the drawing-room.

"Come with me, both of you, to Mrs. Lynn."

A minute later, Mrs. Lynn looked up from her book to behold the culprits, naked as they were born, standing in front of her.

"They have been playing hide-and-seek like this," said Mitchie. "I think you are the person to ask them 'why'."

Mary, taken aback, ejaculated :

"Gracious!"

Micky explained :

"You see, Mum, we wanted to have one more game before going to sleep; and we went to bed earlier than usual."

"We 'membered what you said," chirped Primrose.

"Let me think! What did I say?"

"That we weren't to dress or undress together," replied Michael. "So Prim took off her nightie in her room, and I took off my pyjams in mine. Then I hid myself, and called 'Cuckoo'."

Words, appropriate words, failed Mary. Micky, perceiving her hesitation, continued boldly, as became a would-be Bayard :

"You said that our bodies were temples of the Lord; we ain't ashamed of *them*."

"Aren't," interpolated Mitchie.

"This mustn't happen again," said Mary.

The children retired to bed.

Mary and Mitchie put their heads together. Mitchie exclaimed emphatically :

"Bless them! They *are* innocents. This proves it. One never knows, even at that age, never! Now we do know."

"Yes," sighed Mary, "but how long can we keep them innocent?"

Much to Mitchie's amusement, she detected in Mrs. Lynn (not yet a friend) embarrassment. A matron confronted a maiden lady.

"Imagine," said Mitchie, who was enjoying herself, "that I am the mother of six. I draw the line at more than six. Or, if that is too great a strain on your imagination, Mrs. Lynn, assume that I am the mother of Primrose. That may make things easier for you."

"It does," smiled Mary.

"Prunes and prisms are not part of my mental equipment. I have no patience with false modesty. Ignorance and curiosity lead to prurience."

"I agree."

"What my mother ought to have taught me, I learnt from another girl not much older than myself. Boys acquire a half-knowledge of the forbidden subject from other boys. Bad—very bad. You will not make that mistake."

"No."

"Meanwhile, we can watch and wait."

"Yes."

## II

It was after Micky's Pickwickian experience that Mary considered in all its bearings what French dramatists call *la scène obligatoire*. Micky was observant and inquisitive; Primrose was less observant and more inquisitive. They had been trained to ask questions. To ask questions, according to Mitchie, was a sign of intelligence. Children brought up in the country saw and overheard much that excited natural curiosity; and it has been said that Frodsham-on-Rother was eighteenth century. The villagers, old and young alike, habitually used a coarseness of speech, familiar, let us say, to readers of Fielding and Smollett. The children repeated the rude Doric, and asked what it meant. To transmute it into Attic taxed the wits of Mary and Mitchie. Finally Mary decided that she would enlighten the children together, not apart. She detested procrastination and evasion. What she saw fit to tell them, they would talk over when alone.

Sooner or later one or other would ask a question that couldn't be evaded.

The question was asked in the presence of Primrose by a fairly diligent student of English History.

"I say, Mum, what is a bastard?"

"Now for it," thought Mary.

"A bastard, Micky, is an illegitimate son, a son whose father and mother have never been married."

"I guessed that. Didn't I, Prim?"

"Yes," replied Prim.

"The time has come, children, when I must talk to you plainly about things you don't understand—wonderful and sacred things. It is difficult to do it. Sacred things must be touched in a spirit of reverence. You know enough to behave decently in church, because church is God's House. You are still children, but you can't remain children. You wash your bodies. Why?"

"Because you hate to see us dirty."

"I want you to hate being dirty. I want you to keep your minds as clean as your bodies. A dirty mind is much worse than a dirty body. Do you know that Mitchie and I are trying to put into your minds clean things?"

"Yes."

"Because we wish to keep your minds clean, we don't allow you to play with some of the children in the village."

"I know; we might catch something nasty."

"You might. And what I am going to tell you might be turned into something nasty if it was told to you by the wrong person, and in the wrong way. For the present what I tell you must remain a secret between us three, a sacred secret—"

They raised eager and expectant eyes to hers, as they nodded their heads in acquiescence.

"I want to talk to you about a miracle which you can see and which you can't understand, the miracle that takes place when a bud bursts out of a twig that seems dead, or a chicken out of an egg, or when a lamb is born, or a—baby."

"We know," said Primrose, "that the babies don't come down the chimney—"

"The doctor doesn't bring 'em in a bag," added Micky.

"Have you any idea how they do come?" asked Mary.

Boy and girl looked at each other. Had they blushed, or shown any embarrassment, Mary's heart might have quailed.

"We have wondered how they came," admitted Micky.

"You came from me," said Mary gravely. "Primrose came from her mother. You lay under my heart, my son, part of me, for many months before you were born."

"Why don't men have children?" asked Micky.

"Why indeed?" thought Mary, smiling faintly.

"It is not God's Will that they should," she replied. "I am going to tell you how a flower is born. The miracle is always really the same. If I tell you about the flowers, you will know what I want you to know."

She did it delightfully, using the simplest words. She spoke of the sexes of flowers, of stamen and pistil, of the fertilising pollen, often carried to its seed-case by wind or insects, of the germination and marvellous development of the new flower, perfect at last, and ready in its turn to reproduce its form and loveliness. . . .

The children listened attentively. The very little each knew of botany confirmed every word that dropped slowly from Mary's lips. With Mitchie she had considered each word, rehearsing this scene so obligatory to her. There had been a discussion between the two ladies, not quite frictionless, but entirely good-tempered. Mitchie, the teacher born and made, obstinate in opinion, having a mastery of her own vocabulary which always pleased and surprised Mary, was loth to abandon the text-books, although ready to admit that some of them were comically out of date. She was a great admirer of Professor Blackie, whose captivating little book on *Self Culture*, bound in morocco, held the place of honour next Miss Mitchell's Bible. She did not disdain to quote from Hannah More, a too-neglected writer in these unleisurely days. Mary, on the other hand, after her experiences in mean streets, face to face with ignorance and its twin, conceit, had diminished faith in preaching and preachers. The battle was joined on that.

"Can 'character' be taught?"

"To children—yes."

"I wish I could think so. If I thought so, it would be my duty to double or treble your salary."

Mitchie immediately became less defiant and positive.

"Too disarming," she murmured, faintly flushing. "I am, as fencers say, *touched*."

"Ah! Touched——! Is not touching the essence of teaching, the appeal to the heart rather than the head, and the appeal also to the stomach. I am alluding, as you will guess, to Micky's experience with hot punch and a pipe. I should like to think, Mitchie, that our village girls were taught to be chaste, but I fear that fear of consequences keeps them so, if they are so. Our children try to be reasonably good to please us, and we make the most of that, but how can you teach them to love purity for its own sake?"

"We must do our best, each in her own way. Yours is the mother's way, instinctively you may be right. We work together. You appeal to the heart or the stomach; I appeal to the head. As co-partners we may agree to disagree upon methods, but our objectives are the same."

### III

After the children had gone to bed, Mary sat up late with Mitchie repeating what she had said and attempting to measure the effect of her words.

"Did they apply what you said to themselves?"

"I'm quite sure they did. For the moment their curiosities are satisfied. They have promised to come to me when other questions have to be answered; I have told them that I will answer such questions, and that I am the right person to do so. They weren't shy with me."

"You felt shy with them?"

"At first, not afterwards. I funk'd this talk horribly."

"No wonder!"

"They put me at my ease, simply because their little minds are still clean, thank God. Had they been soiled, I

should have known that I had spoken too late, and then I should have reproached myself for the rest of my life."

"Was the girl more curious than the boy?"

"I think so; it's impossible to say."

"Her mind is subjective; his is objective. To keep it objective, cut off as he is from healthy games, will be no mean achievement."

For an hour at least field-sports, as a substitute for cricket and football, challenged the attention of these two ladies. Of field-sports they knew nothing. Any Sussex squire would have roared with laughter had he heard their views on fox-hunting and shooting. They had to force themselves out of themselves to behold with detachment Micky galloping across country on a safe "conveyance," or Micky shooting blackbirds and bunnies, with Primrose tagging behind him, as was her wont. They agreed that the mere thought of a "gun" in the house, a gun in the hands of a small boy, was terrifying to them, as it would be, most assuredly, to all the maids. Unhappily, Winky was not a sportsman. . . .

"This," said Mitchie trenchantly, "is a man's affair. I really don't know which end of a pony I fear most. And I am now on such pleasant terms with the birds in the garden that I can't bear the thought of their being butchered to make a holiday for Micky. However, for his sake, I carry an open mind about that. Indeed my mind is blank."

"So is mine."

"I suggest that you carry your mind to some good-natured man of your acquaintance."

Mary replied valiantly:

"A timely suggestion—I will."

#### IV

The imps of comedy must have chuckled with glee when Mary besought the advice of Sir George Royal, who was Master of a pack of Harriers, a J.P., a widower, and spoken of (by ladies only) as a "dead" shot. Sir George farmed part of his land, and had two grown-up sons, one in the

Army, the other in the Navy. Mary wrote to Sir George, demanding a cup of tea and a private interview. Sir George courteously insisted upon calling on her.

He rode over, and stabled his horse in Mary's stables, eyeing the empty stalls mournfully. It did not occur to him that he was about to be asked to fill two of them. He supposed that Mary, whom he regarded as a dyed-in-the-wool Londoner, wanted to consult him about her cows. Mary's first cow had "dried up" a month after she had bought it. Sir George learned of this misadventure, and took the inconsiderate beast off her hands, replacing it with another in full milk. That stamped her neighbour as a kindly man. He hustled into the house, mildly excited, and on the best possible terms with himself.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Lynn?"

What couldn't he do?—Her generous smile, her still beautiful eyes, pleaded for her.

"I want you to honour a cheque, a very large cheque, drawn upon the bank of your experience as a sportsman."

Sir George flushed. His wife had never talked in this rather high-falutin' vein; it made him slightly uneasy; and yet, as a change from the diction of the ladies of the hunting-field, it was not altogether unpleasing.

"Yes, yes; of course. Tips—what? You are writing a novel, eh? You want me to vet it. With pleasure. Your father wrote novels; I never read 'em; but I know he did. And so, of course, do you."

"And so, of course, I don't," laughed Mary. "If I did, Sir George, I should not write about sport, simply because I never met a sportsman till I met you."

"Well I'm—! I mean, I'm *surprised*."

He laughed so genially, that she was encouraged to state her case at length. She did this so sensibly and easily that Sir George was captivated. His services, so he assured her, were at her disposition. He would find an honest, sober groom, two ponies, not too hard of mouth, and he would buy, second-hand, a single-barrelled twenty-bore gun, which would be delivered to his own head-keeper. That functionary,

a trusty retainer, would teach the young idea how to shoot, and, most important of all, how to carry a gun without imperilling the sanctity of human life. He summed up judicially :

" You are right, Mrs. Lynn. Master Micky must be entered to hare and rabbit. Missy can take her share of the fun, too. They are jolly kids. It is, believe me, a most important thing to substitute for games some other form of exercise in the fresh air. All is said. Leave this matter to me."

When he had gone, Mary said to Mitchie :

" It was too easy. Sir George is the kindest man——" Mitchie's eyes twinkled.

" I think you underrate your own powers."

" Nonsense ! "

" I'm sure that Sir George is doing this for you personally, not merely to oblige a neighbour."

" He is doing it," retorted Mary hastily ; " and—and nothing else matters."

" For the moment, I agree."

v

The small thatched lodge that flanked on the left the entrance gate to the manor was occupied by Mary's gardener, Amos Bunday, his wife and family. Amos, as has been related, could swallow golden-drop plums—stones and all. He could swallow more than that without straining his sense of *meum* and *tuum*. The children discovered that he could swallow the VIII<sup>th</sup> Commandment, being a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles like eggs and lumps of coal. At the back of the house was the coal and wood shed, separated from the garden by a wall, with a shrubbery between that and the lawn. Micky and Primrose were on the lawn when they heard some object crashing through laurels. Prompt investigation focussed their wits upon a large lump of coal. Micky, who had missed eggs which, so Amos said, were often carried off by rooks and jackdaws, left Primrose on

guard and ran swiftly to the back-yard, where he discovered Amos suspiciously near to the coal-shed. Casually passing the time of day with an old friend, Micky sped back to the shrubbery and waited expectantly, finger upon lip. Within a minute or two, a second lump of coal hurtled through the air and might have crashed upon youthful and excited pates . . . .

"Amos took our eggs," whispered Micky.

"Micky——! Whatever shall we do?"

"It's going to be 'sucks' this time for him."

They waited till they heard Amos whistling in the distance, as he walked leisurely to the kitchen garden. Then Micky, at some personal inconvenience, achieved the feat of returning the two lumps of coal to the unsafe harbourage of the coal-shed. Having accomplished this, he turned triumphantly to Primrose :

"I say, Prim, what would you give to see his face when he comes here to-night to fetch the coal and finds it *gone*?"

Primrose almost swooned with delight at this manifestation of her knight's resource. A dialogue followed :

"Ought we to tell Mum?"

"Ought we?"

"He's such a good kind old chap, Prim. If we tell Mum she may have to sack him——"

"Ye-es."

"He doesn't take much——"

"N-no."

"And he may drop on to it that somebody is up to his little games."

"I b'lieve," said Primrose thoughtfully, "that Naomi takes home things——"

"What things?"

"Oh—food, and all that."

"How do you know?"

"Micky, I b'lieve they *all* do. You know—perkizites."

"You mean they bag what they think won't be missed."

"Yes."

"Amos has all the veg he wants, and fruit too. I daresay he thinks that he has a *right* to Mum's coal——"

" If he thinks that, why doesn't he take it openly ? "

" Well played, Prim."

Primrose, " tickled pink " by praise from Sir Michael, continued :

" I b'lieve Mum knows, 'cos I'm sure Cook told her about Naomi ; and we're so pally with Naomi and Amos that I loathe the idea of telling tales."

" So do I."

Thus a regrettable incident was closed, but Primrose permitted herself one more remark :

" I do wonder if Mrs. Bunday knows."

" Course she knows," declared Micky.

They returned to the lawn. Doubtless the Bundays, *père et mère*, were not altogether the God-fearing, highly respectable persons which (in presence of the Quality) they claimed to be. They had two daughters—Naomi and Rosamond. Rosamond was some three years younger than Naomi ; and it was difficult to believe that the sisters had the same parents. On several occasions Rosamond tripped from the lodge to the manor to help " Nurse " as nursemaid—" temporary to oblige." She was the brightest little thing, very intelligent, blessed with dark eyes and hair, red cheeks and lips, and a captivating smile. Amos, exercising authority but seldom, had insisted upon giving the child a name that suited her. Mrs. Bunday had seen to it that the other children had biblical names. Micky, however, had found out from Amos that a great-grandmother had been baptised Rosamond ; and it transpired that " way back " one of the Bundays had married a gypsy with (so it was affirmed) Spanish blood dancing in her veins. It was impossible to see Rosamond playing with the children, more of a child than they, without thinking of this tincture of Spanish blood. Mary would have engaged the girl permanently, but Nurse (who had to be considered) raised objections. Mary guessed that the poor soul was jealous ; and Naomi, stout, stodgy, plain-featured, might well be jealous too of this laughing, joyous creature so different from herself. Even Cook, a good-natured body, doubted the expediency of engaging sisters as fellow-servants.

Some nagged at each other from morning till night ; others stood shoulder to shoulder against Authority. "Good respectable girls," said Cook, "but better apart."

Accordingly, Rosamond went for a season to the Vicarage ; and thence, alas ! to the *Cat and Fiddle*, the local inn, with claims (not admitted by the villagers) to call itself " hotel." During the summer, trippers on their way to and from Bodiam Castle had luncheon or tea at the *Cat and Fiddle*. A few anglers stayed there . . . a painter or two . . . and occasionally a literary gentleman.

Mrs. Bunday was furious with Rosamond. Mary knew that respectability was her tin god, never to be dishonoured, regarded as a sort of Joss. She had written more than one letter to Mary, always signing herself : "Yours respectfully." She meant "respectfully," but regarded both adverbs as synonyms. Mary pointed out to Mrs. Bunday that the *Cat and Fiddle* had a good name as a decent house of call and that Rosamond was receiving higher wages—and tips. Mrs. Bunday snorted :

"Tips !—Yes, M'm—and kisses too, I'll be bound."

Mary happened to meet Rosamond a few days later. The girl looked prettier than ever in a becoming little frock. She smiled and dimpled when Mary spoke to her, explaining politely that she was "satisfied" with her present place—good food, good pay, and more liberty. Mary guessed that these had not been forthcoming at the Vicarage, where Mrs. Hollywell, mindful of her own careful upbringing, counselled young maids to take their needle when duties were done ; and at the Vicarage the duties of a house-parlourmaid were never done.

As Mary talked to Rosamond with that sympathetic interest which flowed straight from a large heart and a sensible head, she noted how the girl, still in her 'teens, was blooming into a woman. It occurred to her that Rosamond was Spring incarnate, at the blossoming time that comes only once and lasts for so brief a season with girls of her class. Mary upheld "service," provided always that it was not servitude. Under her kindly pressure and presence

the maid became more articulate. She had improved her diction at the *Cat and Fiddle*. She "wanted," so she said blushingly, to "better" herself. . . .

King George now sat upon the throne ; but the great change that the War was about to bring to such young women as Rosamond had not yet taken place. It was impossible for Mary Lynn, despite her enlightened views, to envisage such a change ; but she felt that this joyous creature was asking more of life than life at Frodsham-on-Rother could bestow.

"I—I don't go over home, M'm, 'cos Mawther does pick at me so."

"Your mother loves you dearly."

Rosamond pouted.

"I can't do anything to please her——"

"I'm sure you are the apple of your father's eye."

"I do get nice taalks wud Faather, when he comes along to see me. I was ever so happy when I worked for you, M'm ; I'd just love to come back——"

What a beguiling voice the little witch had ! But, unhappily, Mary was overstaffed. Her parlourmaid happened to be a satisfactory servant. There was no escaping the fact that Rosamond's good looks were against her. Could she be trained as a typist and stenographer ? A discreet question or two provoked the inevitable answer from such a girl :

"I'd hate to leave Frodsham, M'm. If only Mawther could be made to see that I am doing well, and getting good pay."

"Perhaps you have a young man here ? "

Rosamond laughed, and tossed her curls.

"I don't walk out wud country bumpkins. Awkward louts. I don't hold, never did, wud their rough ways."

"I'll speak to your mother," said Mary.

Rosamond thanked her prettily. But Mrs. Bunday was not to be budged from what she held to be an impregnable position. In her opinion Rosy had "demeaned" herself by going to the *Cat and Fiddle*. There was no doing nothink wud young girls nowadays. Mrs. Hollywell was

willing to take back the little besom. Let her go back, and eat humble pie ; and then all would be well for her " over home."

Mary, having done what she could, dismissed the matter from her mind. . . .

And then the awful thing happened.

The girl drowned herself in the Rother. Up to the last, she had managed somehow to hide her condition from the village gossips. The landlady at the inn had discovered it, and despatched Rosamond, not unkindly, to her mother. What passed between that hard woman and her daughter was not revealed at the inquest ; but Rosamond, in despair, had flung herself into the river just below the bridge, not five and twenty yards from the spot where Mary had met and spoken to her.

This horror culminated in a climax, when the facts became known. A letter arrived addressed to the dead girl. The man who wrote it had been absent in America. It seemed that he returned to London to find a letter from her, apprising him of her condition, beseeching his help. He replied, saying that he would come to her at the first opportunity, enclosing money, and with it an offer to marry her. The man reached Frodsham a few days after the funeral. Mary saw him. He seemed to be a decent young fellow enough, almost crazy with grief. He sobbed out his story, the old story of ways and means, the inability of the man to marry without sacrificing his " job," ardent love on both sides, and—so far as Mary could learn—no seduction. *They had just drifted together !*—He loved her ; she loved him. . . .

He was a traveller for a well-known firm who had come to the *Cat and Fiddle* for a brief holiday, to catch the coarse fish in the river. He had no idea that Rosamond was in " trouble " when he went to America to wander from one great city to another. He had promised to return to her when he got back. And he got back too late. . . .

Mary did what she could for him ; and so did Winky. Together, probably, they saved the man from following the girl.

This tragic event has been set down, because of its effect not only on Mary, but on the children. Rosamond was the talk of the village, for a fortnight. Naomi quarrelled with her mother. Civil war drove apart, temporarily, Amos Bunday and his wife. Mary had to cope, and eventually did cope successfully, with a lamentable affair that concerned her and hers. In a sense it forced her hand with Michael and Primrose. But this time she talked with them apart, taking each in turn.

The children were approaching the age of puberty. After consultation with Mitchie, Mary spoke to the boy first. She tried to speak as the father would have spoken, plainly and unmistakably, making no attempt to veil her words in allegory beyond linking together the miracle of reproduction in a flower to the destruction of that flower. Again to her intense relief, the boy betrayed no false shame or embarrassment ; he listened intelligently, moved to his marrow. He kept on repeating : " Poor little Rosie ! She was so sweet—she wasn't *bad*. Why didn't she come to you, Mum ? "

Why indeed ?

With Primrose, Mary felt less at ease. She knew that Lady Cheverton, Felicia, and scores of other women, all equally anxious to preserve and cherish the bloom of innocence, would have procrastinated or (worse !) dissembled, glossing essential facts. She was conscious also that this assumption of a grave responsibility created an unbreakable bond between herself and a very sensitive child. It constituted a declaration of motherhood. From this moment Primrose became her daughter. Something in the tone of her voice made the child aware of this ; she slipped a hand into Mary's comforting grasp ; later on, she crept into her arms, whispering : " I do love you, Mum, for telling me. . . . How good you are to me. . . . "

What Mary said can only be indicated. She spoke of the sanctity of the body, of its uses and abuses, its trials and temptations. She spoke very slowly, praying that the right words might come to her lips. . . .

We may believe that they did.

As before, the girl was more curious than the boy. Primrose knew, everybody knew, why Rosamond had been turned from her mother's house.

"If it had been me, Mum, would you have done that?"

"No."

"What would you have done?"

"I should have done what I could to help you."

Primrose clung to her, saying nothing more.

From each child Mary exacted a promise not to talk to the other about matters not unclean in themselves, but privacies which became unclean if exposed immodestly.

She sat on alone, after Primrose had left her, turning over in her mind words and phrases which had been on every lip in the village. Not the least sad side of tragedy is the comedy that over-lies it, mocking it, making grotesque "faces" at it, provoking often the harsh hard laughter of fools. Amos Bunday—and many others—held that a belated offer of marriage had restored Rosamond's good name. Naomi repeated with horror that one ancient dame, far too old to fear any gossip concerning her own youth, had not forgotten that in her day suicides were buried at dead of night, at cross-roads, with a stake driven through their hearts——!

And critics, presumably men of experience, had assailed Thomas Hardy virulently, because he had the faith and the courage to speak of his unhappy "Tess" as a pure woman.

What was purity? What was modesty? What was chastity?

The grey mists crept up the Rother from the sea, blotting out the pleasant water meadows. From her open window, where Mary sat, she could see the church with its tower rising above the yews in the churchyard. Beneath one of them lay Rosamond and her unborn child. *Rosa Bunday—Rosa Mundi!* That quip had come from Winky, when he had watched the pretty hoyden romping with the children. It came back to Mary with furtive significance; it seemed to creep into her mind, as the mists crept nearer to the low-lying churchyard. The roses of the world—those frail blossoms, whose petals gave forth their fragrance in *pot-*

*pourri*, and distilled through the long years sweet memories of their brief blooming time. A line from *Sordello* flitted disconcertingly to her :

. . . *Any nose*  
*May ravage with impunity a rose.*

Ah ! The pity of it ! And the apparent helplessness of the thorn to protect the tender flower. . . .

The mists reached the churchyard, and hid it. Mary stood up, shivered, and closed the window.

## CHAPTER VIII

1914

### I

**I**N the Spring of 1914, Sir George asked Mary to marry him. An elderly gentleman, admiring in Mary qualities conspicuous in himself such as sound commonsense, good humour, and intelligence, did not essay the *rôle* of Romeo. In his youth Sir George had ridden hard and straight across country ; in middle age he had abandoned the chase of the fox and pursued the circling hare. It was known that he never jumped a stiff fence if he could find a gap, but he "got" to his hounds. . . .

He pursued Mary in a somewhat similar spirit. The ardour of the hunt was there, but he regarded her as a hare circling round ground now familiar to her, loth to leave it——! But, pray mark you, a damned fine woman. If Winky burst into poetry when Mrs. Lynn's name cropped up in course of conversation, in like manner Sir George exploded into prose. Regarding Mary as a hare, he had to take into consideration the leverets. He paid court to Micky and Primrose, and won their youthful hearts in the "heartiest" fashion ; he took them in hand with a jovial grin upon his sun-and wind-tanned face ; he stood no "nonsense" from either ; he appealed to their "sporting" instincts, innate in each despite petticoat government.

"He likes us," said Micky to Primrose, "but he wants Mum."

"Does Mum know that?"

"You bet she does. He gives himself dead away whenever he looks at her."

Calmly and coolly they discussed the situation, as children do and as children always will. No woman will be surprised

to hear that the girl, a full year younger than the boy, took the more enlightened view concerning a possibility that was approximating to a probability. It would be unkind and untrue to affirm that she was thinking of herself, but, as a vitally interested party to such a marriage, she could see with clearer vision than Micky how it would affect herself and him.

"He'd be awfully decent to all of us," said Prim.

There was no doubt of that. East Sussex acclaimed Sir George as a man who was "decent" to everybody, particularly his own people. In the hunting-field he swore as our troops swore in Flanders, sparing neither age nor sex, but the essential spirit that informed the man was kindly and generous.

"Mum told me long ago that she would never marry again, never!"

"But we change our minds sometimes."

"We—?"

Primrose quoted the Wizard of the North :

"Variable as the shade by the light quivering aspen made."

Micky nodded. Capping verses was a game encouraged by the Olympians ; both children were quick at it.

"That applies to you, not to Mum. She's like me. Mum and I don't change."

"All right. But, you see, Mum *might* take him because she's unselfish ; she *might* take him because it would be a big thing for you."

This tasted unpalatable but Micky tried to assimilate it.

"Why?"

"Mum wants you to be a man. Even Cook says that it takes a man to make a man. Mum loves to see you with Winky and Sir George——"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"If you were *my* boy, I should feel just the same."

Micky laughed at her, which she hated. As a rule, when the pair had what Naomi called a "tiff and a turn," the boy had the best of it. Then Prim would take cover behind

exasperating silences, looking wiser than she felt. At the moment she felt wiser than she looked.

"Any fool can laugh at what he doesn't understand," she retorted hotly.

"Keep your hair on. Girls are echoes. You repeat what Cook says, and what Mitchie says. You got that last from Mitchie. Now you can get something from me. Mum will say 'No' to Sir George, if he pops the question."

"He'll pop it," said Prim.

## II

He did.

The proposal had its humours. Sir George said bluntly :

"Now, Mary Lynn, don't you think that you and I might make a match of it? Let me have my say. You have honoured me with your friendship—and your confidence. Whatever happens, I want to keep them. Your children shall be my children ; my house shall be your house. Look ahead, you dear woman. In the nature of things the children will leave you. You will be left alone. I know what loneliness is ; you don't. Mind you, I ask for more than companionship. My fires aren't out, thank God ! I can honour you and love you. I've always been a home-bird. Now, what say you ? "

He looked keenly into her clear eyes, still beautiful, a justification of the sonnet inspired by them when she was fifteen.

Very gently she said "No."

He argued his case at greater length, playing what he deemed to be his trump card last.

"Don't you think, Mary, that I could help you immensely with Micky ? "

"You could," she smiled faintly ; "and you will ; but *my* fires are out. They can never be rekindled. I loved Micky's father. When he died, something died in me. I knew it at the time. Many women ought to remarry ; and many men. But there will always be exceptions. I happen to be one."

He took her hand and kissed it gallantly.

" We remain stout friends, Mary ? "

" Yes, George."

" Damn it ! I could blubber like a boy."

He went his way without further talk.

For a few days misgivings assailed her. Sir George had touched a weak spot, when he spoke of the loneliness that must be her lot when the children left her. It was difficult to think of life without them. She held marriages of convenience to be spiritually inconvenient, but there might be exceptions, if other interests were at stake. The critical faculty, so strong in her, the reasoning powers which both she and Mitchie brought to bear upon even trivialities, failed her when she attempted to measure in all its dimensions the great word—sacrifice. Was any sacrifice too great for a mother to make for her son ? The gods might " throw incense " upon a marriage of convenience if it secured the manhood of Micky. . . .

Her misgivings soon passed. Sir George made it plain that friendship for her and the children was constant. Other matters engrossed her attention.

### III

England was on the eve of cataclysmal war—and nobody knew it. By this time Mary was out of touch with her London friends. She had made new friends in Sussex, most of them reactionaries. Acting in a sense with them, she had to react to them, because she wanted them to be " nice " to the children, which they were. Mitchie went on repeating her cherished *dictum* : " You can't have it both ways." The children were racy of the soil ; they loved this remote rural district, out in all weathers, knowledgable about the habits of wild things, occasionally wild themselves when the strong south-west wind blew blood into their cheeks and set their pulses a-dancing.

Micky's heart now gave little cause for anxiety ; but he remained " weedy," long, lank, with not enough flesh on

big bones. When would he "furnish up" like Prim? It was too late to think of sending him to a preparatory school, but eager matrons poured into Mary's ears the names of select establishments at Eastbourne, St. Leonard's-on-Sea, Bexhill, and Bognor, where delicate boys received special care and tutelage. However, Sir George had something to say about them: "Tut, tut! let well alone! These schools may be good enough in their way, but do you want Micky to be thinking about his inside? Do you want him pampered? The boy's coming on, a promising colt, let him gallop about your paddocks and mine; and we'll keep an eye on him."

Mentally, both Micky and Primrose had outstripped children of their age. Thanks to Mitchie, they had learned to love learning for its own sake; and they loved each other's company.

It was certain that Micky had his father's head—and much that was in it. Confronted with any difficulty the boy would cock a firm chin, smile, and fix his grey-blue eyes steadily upon any object that seemed to be out of reach, like a magpie's nest thoughtfully built in a fork of some branch that would not bear a marauder's weight. He understood perfectly that the big things in life were hard to attain, knowledge not common to the ordinary public schoolboy, who rivets his eyes to small, facile successes exacting muscle rather than mind. Mary found herself wondering if weak muscles strengthened the mind. Mitchie contended that it was so.

"Why," she asked, "are plain-featured women more agreeable, as a rule, than the beauties? Because they know that beauty is skin-deep and mind isn't. I began practising my little powers to please as soon as I found out that my face was not my fortune."

It is more difficult to attempt even a thumb-nail sketch of Primrose. Micky flicked her on the raw when he spoke of her as an echo. *Echo respondet nympha!* That tag had come from Winky, hard-pressed now to keep pace with his pupil, when they read together Livy and Tacitus. Primrose was a nymph, a Dryad, or an Oread. Her auburn curls

clustered about her delicate, slightly sensuous face ; she had none of the awkward lankiness of Michael ; already the child's limbs were exquisitely proportioned and slenderly rounded. Joy in the passing moment exuded from every pore of her skin. Mitchie affirmed that she resembled the famous Greuze, entitled *Innocence*, the picture of a young girl clasping a lamb. Mitchie, however, spoke of all such pictures, whether famous or not, as "chocolate-boxy." She used this adjective with telling effect when she detected in Primrose vanity and coquetry. So far the nymph was delightfully free from either in the presence of Mary and Micky, but, now and again, with admiring visitors, she exhibited airs and graces.

Micky treated her as a sister. What she thought about that can only be guessed. The boy was seldom demonstrative, and he accepted Prim's caresses as a matter of course. One day, some foolish woman seeing them together exclaimed dramatically : "Paul and Virginia!" Mary shot a cautionary glance at her ; but Primrose had overheard the remark.

Who was Paul?

Who was Virginia?

She set herself to find out, because Mary's cautionary glance had not escaped her sharp eyes. As Mitchie happened to be absent at the time, Primrose questioned her when they were alone together. Mitchie "rose," like a trout at a May Fly.

"*Paul and Virginia*? A most overrated book! A silly, slushy romance about two children who ought to have been soundly spanked."

"Gracious! What did they do?"

An angry snort preceded Miss Mitchell's curt criticism of the little classic.

"It was written by Bernardin de St. Pierre, a friend of Rousseau. Briefly, it is the love story of two children, which had a vogue in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and in England among the sentimentalists. I should object to your reading it."

"Why? Is it improper, Mitchie?"

Miss Mitchell considered the adjective, glancing at the eager little face so near her own. Primrose had perched herself upon the arm of Mitchie's big chair.

"Improper?"—Mrs. Grundy's word. And a word used improperly by most people. In America, not so long ago, it was considered improper to speak of 'legs.' Bah! There is a story, probably apocryphal, of some ultra-refined fools who trowsered the legs of pianos——"

Primrose laughed. She loved Mitchie when she talked in this serio-comic strain.

"Purge your vocabulary of a silly word when used in the sense of 'indecent'."

"Is *Paul and Virginia* indecent?"

"Indecent to me. It's a pastoral of calf-love charmingly told. But the author plays throughout with sacred fire. I have no patience with false sugary sentiment. This book must have put silly and wrong ideas into thousands of youthful pates. To my notion that is not decency."

"You—you think calf-love silly?"

Mitchie affected not to notice that her pupil was blushing. She was well aware that Primrose had never accepted Michael as a brother.

"I think it leads to silliness," she replied gravely; "and I speak from personal experience."

"Oh, Mitchie! Tell me—please."

"As an awful warning?" she chuckled. "Well, well, I will. I was an ugly duckling, Prim—and I knew it. And at your age I hankered after forbidden fruit, books placed by my father out of my reach, as he thought. I read some of them. Trashy music appeals to children; so do trashy books. Also, remember this: I hadn't too much of the right sort of love, the love that you have had. I—I wallowed in love stories; I wanted to have a love affair of my own."

"Oh-h-h! Fancy——!"

"The right word! It was—fancy, imagination, curiosity, a craving for excitement. I blush now at what I did——"

"What did you do?"

"I started a quest after a twin soul."

"That sounds funny."

" It wasn't funny at the time. I had gumption enough to know that I shouldn't find my twin soul among the boys of my acquaintance, rather common boys ; so I set my cap at a man, a young, good-looking Frenchman who gave me music lessons. I thought him adorable. He was a coxcomb—and a beast, but I have to admit in strictest confidence that I—I made the first advances. Does that shock you ? "

" N-no."

" I worked hard to please him, but often I didn't please him. Then he would slap my hands—I was such a lovesick idiot that one day I caught hold of his hand, covered it with kisses and—and burst into tears ! "

" Mitchie——!"

" It did the trick," continued Mitchie grimly. " He looked astonished—I well remember that—and without saying a word he took me into his arms and kissed away my tears. A minute later I found out that he was a beast. And young as I was, child, I knew that I had roused the beast in him. I flew to my mother ; I told her everything ; I never saw the young man again. *My twin soul—!* I wasn't much the worse for this—this misadventure in calf-love ; but I was terribly humiliated. All the same, I had learned at first hand that even an ugly little girl of thirteen must respect herself if she wants respect from others. No regrets."

" But—if he hadn't been a beast ? "

" Ah ! Then the affair becomes comic-opera. Conceding, for the sake of argument, that two immature young persons, like Paul and Virginia, fall in love—what next ? "

" I—I don't know."

" Of course you don't ; but I do. They are not old enough to marry. And calf-love may become an obsession, I mean it may fill the mind with itself, assume undue proportions, drive out other interests and natural ambitions. And lastly, answer this, if you can : Does any boy or girl of fourteen know what they will want at five and twenty ? Do *you* think, as I did, that at your age you can pick and choose a twin soul ? "

" Mitchie, dear, you make me feel such a baby."

" Good ! We haven't wasted our time, have we ? One moment. How did this talk come about ? "

" Oh, I just heard somebody say to Mum that Micky and I reminded her of Paul and Virginia."

" Really ? And what did Mrs. Lynn say in reply ? "

" Nothing. Mum made a visiting face. And then I became curious. That's all."

" And quite enough, too," said Miss Mitchell.

#### IV

On August the 4th, Mary read a headline :

*Germany declares War with England.*

The first effect of this in Frodsham-on-Rother was ludicrous. Mary, for one, found herself without petty cash. The banks had closed their doors. Two hours later she was amused rather than alarmed to learn from his own lips that Sir George also was *sans le sou*. He had borrowed a few pounds from his butler, which he offered to share with Mary. The villagers were buying stores ; the holiday-makers endeavoured to return home. . . .

Sir George, naturally enough, was thinking and talking of his two sons. The soldier was under orders to embark at Portsmouth. Sir George rushed down in his car to dine with the mess. He returned to report that he had seen the reservists joining the regiment, not one the worse for liquor. He, and every other man of Mary's acquaintance, spoke of the All Highest as stark, staring mad. Lloyd George counselled England to " carry on " as usual. There had been a placard : " Twenty thousand Germans repulsed at Nancy." Optimists predicted that any reverse would precipitate revolution in Germany.

The King asked for half a million regular troops.

Mitchie was absent on her summer holiday. Mary had sole charge of the children. Micky declared his intention of joining the Boy Scouts. Sir George, greatly interested, had a detachment in camp near Hastings. He

prevailed upon Mary to let the eager boy join up, pledging himself to keep an eye on him.

"I must go, Mum," said Micky.

"I think you must," replied Mary.

There was scare-talk of invasion ; and "rats" deserted many of the East-Coast towns. To make matters more depressing continuous rain fell, which dampened everything except military ardour. All the village urchins were playing "soldiers."

A report of a big battle provoked from Naomi the remark that it must be true because she had heard the firing ! Micky asked her : "What will you do if the Germans get after you ?" and she replied with the Sussex drawl : "You waait an' see, Maaster Micky."

This was the interesting moment when lovers of Germany and interpreters of her Peace Policy felt somewhat cheap. Mary wondered what the churches would do ? Mr. Hollywell, more pinguid than usual, preached a sermon on Eternal Punishment !

Mary read an article in the *Chronicle*, by Wells, dealing with the map of Europe after the War. She fought desperately against an ever-increasing depression, partly due, perhaps, to the abominable weather. Hollywell's foolish sermon distressed her. Not a word had come from him about the lessons that a world war must teach ; not a suggestion that there should be less bickering in humble homes, less swilling of ale, less scandalous gossip. To Mary came a vivid conception of Omnipotence offended by countries torn in two by internal dissensions, with millions ground down by poverty and ignorance upon the one hand ; and, on the other, a set of rich and highly-cultivated people wrapped in self-indulgence and indifference. Such a war might be the only means of purging nations, and uniting them ultimately in a bond of lasting peace and goodwill. What a theme to preach from a pulpit ! Obviously, in Frodsham, the War was considered from the point of view of the individual. One old gammer said : "I doant doubt, M'm, that it be all for the beest, but, fur pity's saake, where be I goan' to git my Berlin wool ?" Mary heartened her by

observing : " Our brave soldiers will bring it from Berlin for you."

Micky marched away.

He went gaily enough, very proud of his new kit, secretly resolved to capture a spy. Spies had been captured ; everybody wondered what was done with them. A pall of silence and secrecy concerning all military proceedings hung over the country. It lifted a little when the good news came that a million Russians were approaching the German frontier.

" It will be over in six weeks," declared Winky.

v

Next Sunday, Mary was struck by the amazing relevancy of the Psalms : " O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoners come before thee, according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die."

Micky might have been one of the many young men appointed to die. If she had married his father five years earlier—and how often she had wished that it had been so ! —Micky might be now in France. . . .

Primrose, affirming for the first time in her life that she wished she had been born a boy, knitted comforters for the poor Belgians. Mary considered the possibility of turning her house into a small hospital. She wanted to do it, but Authority said, " No."

The Expeditionary Force of 165,000 men was landed in France without a single casualty. The high seas were clear for our commerce and sealed to the enemy. The Bank Rate fell to five per cent.

So undulant is human nature that before August was out, men, and women were " carrying-on " much as usual. Winky, eager to go to the Front as a padre, said to Mary :

" I am hoping that crazy Willie will escape injury."

" Are you ? "

" Yes ; if he appoints himself Commander-in-Chief, what an asset he will be to us."

Mary recalled what Lynn had said about the British habit of underrating enemies.

She read that the Boulogne fish-girls had kissed our Tommies good-bye. She had been to Boulogne ; she had seen the fish-girls !

Sir George rode over, bringing tidings of Micky.

“ What do you think he’s doing ? ”

“ I haven’t the remotest idea—”

“ He’s our cook.”

“ What ! ”

“ I thought he might overdo, racing here and there like the others. So I made him bottle-washer. In a week, he was elevated to his present position. He cooks uncommonly well. You shall pay us a visit and taste his soups and stews.”

She did.

It was a memorable excursion through Sussex lanes, spinneys, and woods, across downs, to the Boy Scouts’ camp. They were not playing at soldiers ; they were soldiers. Knowing that his mother was coming, Micky had assumed a white paper cap.

Behold the *chef* !

He looked well and happy, quite able to hold his own with a democratic crowd of youngsters and proud of his pots and pans, scrupulously clean, a cog on the great wheel. He said gleefully : “ We’re in the danger zone, Mum. If a Zep comes over, we may be bombed.”

Sir George was financing the camp. He bustled about, showing his visitor everything, but when she asked for special information gleaned in London he laughed not too genially :

“ I was in London the day before yesterday ; I went to my club ; I found there a chilling pessimism. The elder members were portentous with their ‘ I’m credibly informed—’ before springing on me some dismal bit of news. I annoyed one or two, I hope, by retorting briskly : ‘ Ten to one ! ’ ”

“ Ten to one,” repeated Mary.

“ Yes ; I offered to lay the Jeremiahs ten to one in sovereigns that they were not *credibly informed*.”

“ George, you are adding cubits to your stature.”

"No flowers—by special request. Mary, I don't know how things are ; nobody knows ; nobody can know ; but it isn't going to be over this side of Christmas."

She returned to Frodsham a happier woman. Micky had astounded her because his stew was fit to eat. When she praised it, he replied : "I was shown how. Sir George sent for his own cook. She's a corker. Of course I'd sooner nip about with the others, but we have to do our own cooking, and I feel jolly well bucked when the other boys ask for a second help."

"I hardly dare to kiss the *chef*."

"Mum, you are a sport."

## VI

Mitchie came back from her holiday looking worn, sad—and shabby. Mary guessed what had happened. Her father was short of work ; her mother, growing more infirm and querulous as the years passed, had made inordinate demands upon a daughter's sympathy and affection. When she kissed Mitchie, that lady said sharply : "I've had a depressing holiday ; and I'd rather not talk about it." Nevertheless, she returned the pressure of Mary's hand. Of the War, she observed trenchantly : "Everybody seems to be groping their way through a pea-soup fog."

Living in Frodsham, Mary was constrained, like her humbler neighbours, to consider herself. The War had taken away Micky. If Winky could "wangle" what he spoke of as "preferment," a billet at the Front, Micky would lose his tutor and friend. But, at the moment, there was no "front." French had achieved his masterly retreat ; the Huns—nobody called them Germans after the Belgian atrocities—were pressing on and on. The All Highest, so it was reported, had ordered his first dinner in Paris ! *La Ville Lumière* languished in darkness ; the cafés were closed at eight !

Two women, philosophical enough concerning the ordinary ups and downs of life, gazed at each other in perplexity.

Micky, of course, would come home when a temporary camp of Boy Scouts was broken up. If Winky left Frodsham, it might be possible to engage another tutor for him.

But the insistent question, so difficult to answer, cropped up again and again : What was the right path in life for him ?

Mitchie believed that he might become an ardent and successful naturalist. He was an enthusiastic collector of birds' eggs and butterflies, a lover of Nature in all her moods and tenses—and adventurous.

" I can't see him," said Mitchie, " glued to a desk, or reading for the Bar. We have trained him to be independent."

" I wanted that always."

" I know. He reads books of travel ; he studies maps. General information appeals to him ; he hasn't an idle bone in his body——"

" If it were a stronger body——"

" We must take our bodies as we find them. He has a mind of many facets. Women want love ; men want life. Most of us get what we want, if we want it hard enough."

" His childhood is over, Mitchie."

" It is."

• • • • •

As they were talking, peering into the future, Micky lay curled up in his blankets. Camp-life, despite its discomforts, had captivated his fancy ; a camp-fire warmed his marrow. His brother-scouts were stay-at-homes, hoping to do more or less what Father " did," to tread well-trodden paths. Micky's particular friend happened to be the son of a professional cricketer who had played for Sussex. The boy " bucked " about " my Dad " till Micky innocently asked : " Has he played for England ? " And if not, why not ? The answer : " Dad isn't good enough," leaked out regretfully. Another boy was the son of a successful tradesman. He " bucked " about " big deals." Micky knew enough Latin to think to himself : "*Panem et Circenses.*" Winky had translated this as " Food and Fun." The millions demanded *that*. Even at this early stage of the Great

War, when the issues hung tremblingly in the balance, the possibility of defeat was ruled by Boy Scouts as out of court, unthinkable. They repeated the street-corner slogan : " This is the war that will end war." After the War, everybody would have a good time, deservedly earned.

What was a good time ?

He had not the standards of other boys ; he had never considered their standards, a great asset, the greater because he was unconscious of it. Oddly enough, when he found himself with other boys, this had not been a disability in their eyes, as it would have been at a public school. On the contrary, he stood out above the common herd, a herd representing all classes, different from them inasmuch as he echoed the sound sense of Mary and Mitchie, *plus* the masculine *dicta* of Winky and Sir George. He astounded his fellows, not only as a disconcerting note of interrogation, but as an exponent of what Olympians said and thought. His Scoutmaster, a youth of seventeen, paid marked attention when Micky modestly quoted Sir George as his authority upon topics of current interest. It never occurred to Micky that a boy's opinion upon *anything* was worth having.

A boy's notion of a " good time " seemed to Micky questionable. It didn't lead anywhere. Mitchie's pupil couldn't acquire the happy-go-lucky attitude of the crowd. It affected him negatively, because he had a sense of proportion, of values. Mitchie's diatribes against the folly and fatuity of " kidding oneself " sustained him in heart-to-heart talks with inexperienced " kids." They just " bleated."

Every night, before he fell asleep, he would think over the events of the day. Mary had trained him to do so. It had become a habit. Any intelligent boy who can take stock of to-day is concerned about to-morrow. He had been pitch-forked into intimate contact with boys who would have to earn their keep when they were fifteen. They accepted this fact in a proper spirit. It seemed to Micky that they accepted their " good times " in much the same spirit. It was " fun " to stand at a corner and " pass remarks " upon the foot-passengers. It was " fun " for the elder boys to take the monkeys' walk and try to " click " with pert flappers. To

roam afield in search of a rare butterfly was not fun, to climb a steep cliff merely for the sake of "conquering" a perilous ascent was "rotten." . . .

Under his blankets, thrilled by the possibility of a bomb disturbing his slumbers, he could transport himself to the Brazils or the coral islands of the Pacific. It would be "heavenly" to explore the upper waters of the Amazon, or to find some new bird of paradise, or a butterfly measuring a foot from wing to wing——!

But dominating these plans for the future, which included *inter alia* the restoration of Bodiam Castle, was the reflection:

"Mum expects me to make good. I—I *must* make good."



## Book II

### BLOSSOMING

But Pleasures are like poppies spread,  
    You seize the flower, its bloom is shed ;  
Or, like the snowfall in the river,  
    A moment white, then melts forever.

BURNS, *Tam o' Shanter.*



## CHAPTER IX AFTER THE WAR

### I

MICHAEL LYNN was eighteen years old when the War came to an end, and able to say that he did his "bit" in it. During the last six months, he served in the Transport Service. During the same period, Primrose worked as a V.A.D. in a hospital in Brighton. Mary remained at the manor alone with Mitchie, who accepted (not without protest) the position of paid companion. When war fever assailed Primrose, Mary was able to diagnose the case. Primrose belonged to the rising generation of girls ; she was temporarily (so Sir George said) "out of hand." Comparing notes with other matrons, Mary avoided their notes of exclamation. Some, the harder-headed, discounted patriotic motives. "Our girls want excitement, change, and independence." Sir George, when consulted, growled out : "Oh, give the filly her head." He had lost his soldier son, but the other (in the Senior Service) had distinguished himself. The War had aged Sir George. Mary, still on the sunny side of fifty, was little changed. She had to admit the validity of Prim's plea that she must do "something." Accordingly Mary found her a billet in a hospital for wounded officers, admirably "run" by a great lady who promised to keep an eye on sweet seventeen ; Mary accepted this pledge with a pinch of salt.

The children had cut loose. In the opinion of East Sussex, looseness, laxity and licence were on the rampage from one end of the kingdom to the other. What could you do about it ? Nothing. Mitchie contended that the War had made young girls not immoral but amoral. Their emotions were in ferment ; and then the cork flew out of the bottle.

Primrose came back to the manor before Micky. That same night, alone with Mary, she announced her engagement to a certain Major Wharton, of whose existence Mary was unaware. Apparently, the best reason Primrose could give for conduct vocal for explanation was this :

“ He was shot to bits after the advance on the Somme.”

Mary said quietly :

“ I—I am not prepared for what you tell me.”

“ How could you be ? We became engaged this morning, just before I left. He’s a dear. You’ll say so, Mum, when you see him.”

“ Is he in a position to marry you, child ? ”

“ Oh, no ; he’s down and out, poor darling.”

Mary smiled faintly ; the affair surely couldn’t be serious. Picking her way into the girl’s confidence, conscious only of an appalling shock, she said tentatively :

“ Do you know anything about his people ? ”

“ Nothing. But—I’m not engaged to *them*.”

“ Still—”

“ Oh, Mum, do be nice to me. You are the first person who knows. He’s the bravest of the brave ! ”

“ He must be,” thought Mary, as she kissed a tearful cheek.

“ And I tell you again he was shot to bits.”

“ Is that why you love him ? ” she asked gently.

“ Of course it is. He has the D.S.O. and he was mentioned twice in despatches.”

Mary temporised. What else could she do ?

“ I’ll see Major Wharton.”

## II

She saw him next day. It was difficult to believe that he was six and twenty. At the first glance she said to herself : “ He can’t live ; his days are numbered.” Before they met, she had gleaned a little information about him. He was a Guardsman. That might mean anything or nothing. Before the War it would have meant nearly everything. Without hesitation he said pleasantly :

" Of course, Mrs. Lynn, you think we have rushed things ? "

" Quite candidly I do."

He smiled disarmingly.

" I'm such a wreck, eh ? And she's the sweetest little thing—irresistible. She told me that you had adopted her, mothered her. And you are thinking what a cad I am."

Mary's cheeks flushed. He continued, in the same even tone of voice :

" When a man has been through Hell, he doesn't pause to knock at the door of Heaven. And she, bless her ! opened the door."

" Oh-h-h ! "

" And I fell in."

A strange silence followed. Each was appraising the other. To her amazement Major Wharton, looking like a boy fresh from Eton, continued :

" She might do worse than marry what is left of me. I'm quite well-to-do. I can provide for her."

" You—you are a rich man ? "

" Quite well-to-do. If I live I shall be somebody some day."

Mary felt terribly disconcerted, at a loss for words, wondering what he would say next.

Had reason deserted this chaotic world ? Or—to put it another way—had the boys who fought in the War and the girls who had left home banded themselves together in a sort of League of Disorder and yes, Disobedience ? Not necessarily disobedience to parents, but a sustained refusal to acknowledge common sense and common prudence ? She felt sorry for this young fellow and exasperated by her own impotence. He was courteous, slightly ironical in his manner, and he looked at her as if she, not he, were unreasonable.

" Did Primrose tell you that she would have about a thousand a year when she comes of age ? "

" No. She didn't."

" She is ' provided for ' already. I look upon her as my child——"

" Yes ; she speaks of you as priceless, the greatest thing on earth."

"It is pleasant to hear that. But I am not legally her guardian; and I know nothing of the law. Her trustees must be told. If they refused their consent—"

"What would happen?"

"I don't know. Are you asking Primrose to be your wife—or your nurse?"

He remained silent.

"I may recover, Mrs. Lynn. With such an incentive to live—who knows?"

Mary dared not say brutally: "Aren't you two children mistaking pity for love? I refuse to sanction an engagement. This affair is cruelly unfair on her. That is not merely my opinion. Any person of experience would say the same." If she said that, and the words hung upon her tongue's tip, what would he reply? It was conceivable that he might turn his face to the wall and give up the ghost. . . .

"Have a talk with my doctor," he suggested.

### III

The doctor happened to be in the hospital. He, too, was a young man, capable, overworked, and sorely in need of a long holiday. He had spent two years in the danger zone, dealing with emergency cases.

"Will Wharton recover?" he asked impatiently. "Who can tell? I've seen miracles happen, Mrs. Lynn. The will to live is everything—everything. In the last twenty-four hours I have noted a decided change for the better. A week ago I thought he was going west."

Mary could not bring herself to mention Primrose. The doctor took her to be a kinswoman of his patient; he saw that she was sensible and self-controlled, anxious to hear and able to bear the truth.

He continued jerkily:

"There may be a girl in this case. We had here a most inefficient V.A.D., a pretty little darling, who could read aloud French and English delightfully. She wasn't good

for much else, except housework—not at all to her taste. I have a notion, Mrs. Lynn, that she and young Wharton did more talking than reading. I let well alone. She bucked him up. In these desperate cases, we clutch at straws. That's that—for what it's worth."

"Thank you," said Mary.

The young surgeon hurried away. Mary could get nothing more out of him. She could rely upon the discretion of the lady who had promised to keep an eye on Primrose, but what could she say or do? Finally a distracted woman returned to Major Wharton, lying helpless on a *chaise longue* in a glass-enclosed winter garden facing the sea. She recalled what the will to live had achieved for Micky. . . .

A screen shut off Wharton from draughts and from other officers. Mary sat down.

"The doctor is pleased with you," she said. "He assures me that there has been a change for the better. Get well. Then we can put our heads together. I can't say more now, can I?"

"No; you are very kind, very understanding. Primrose said that you would be."

She went back to Frodsham. But she had two hours to wait for her train. The time was spent upon the Front, crowded in mid-winter by uproarious young people. The air was crisply cold; the sun shone; the Channel sparkled. London-by-the-Sea seemed to be "mafficking." Jews and Gentiles challenged Mary's attention. Mitchie would have said: "Mark the relaxation." Every young face, beads on an endless string, was asserting its *right* to throw dull care to the dogs. Amorous couples abandoned restraint. In one of the shelters, where two old gentlemen were apparently engrossed in their newspapers, a Jack and Jill, defying decorum, were locked in each other's arms, lip to lip. Mary thought: "The don't-care-a-damns!" Jack was in khaki; Jill wore a new coney seal coat. Their joint ages might have numbered thirty-six winters. A band blared. When it ceased blaring, the crowd cheered. A space had been cleared for dancers. Mary watched them. Love-making, she decided, was the predominant interest—and instinct.

She attempted to interpret the expression on the girls' faces. They gazed adoringly and unblushingly at the boys who had fought and survived. And the boys, for the most part, accepted this homage as a matter of course, as they accepted cigarettes. Mary thought of the mothers and maiden aunts behind the smug windows of the houses. What did *they* think of this carnival? Some, perhaps, remained indoors, unable to think at all, shocked into apathy and indifference. Here and there, looking like lost souls, wandered the middle-aged and elderly clad in funereal black. Their aloof austerity struck a melancholy note of protest, unavailing protest. The youngsters eyed them with defiance, as if to say : " Hop it, you wet blankets ! "

The War was over.

With the one exception of Armistice Day, it had been difficult to realise this in Frodsham. There the War ended even as it began in stupefying calm. In 1914 the villagers refused to consider destruction ; in 1918 they ignored reconstruction in the same stolid, stupid, bovine fashion. Between pre-War and post-War days tossed an Atlantic, unbridgable, immeasurable. Mary, after failing to grasp public opinion *en gros*, fell back upon individuals. Naomi, for example, had lost the faithful swain with whom she walked out. Immediately, she secured another. Winky had "wangled" preferment. Before he left for France, he became engaged to the young lady whom, hitherto, he had courted intermittently. But she—"O my Amy shallow-hearted!"—had married in haste a young officer home on leave! To Mary's amazement (and relief) Winky accepted this humiliating experience with Christian resignation tempered by pagan fortitude, saying to Mary : "There are others." Mary replied, with confounding acerbity for her : "You are well rid of a baggage." But Winky sealed a fountain of sympathy by observing placidly : "Poor dear! she fell in love with love. I—I treated her too reverentially. All that's gone by the board."

London-by-the-Sea opened Mary's eyes to the startling change in her own sex—if it was a change. Up till now she had repudiated indignantly Byron's indictment : "Every

woman is at heart a rake." But she remembered what Graves had affirmed about poets. According to him, poets penetrated to the depths of the human heart beholding what was veiled from less gifted persons. Prose could describe life as it appeared to be ; poetry saw life elementally.

It was certain now that young women did not want to be treated reverentially. Lips were common as the stairs. The flappers cocked their chins at a provocative angle, pertly surveying Mary, with eyes that flashed their message : " Yes ; it's kissing time for us ; if you don't like it, you can lump it." Well, one had to lump it. Presently the pendulum would swing the other way.

But meanwhile——?

#### IV

Primrose accepted prettily Mary's injunctions. The engagement, such as it was, must remain secret till Major Wharton's health justified an announcement in the *Morning Post*. The lovers could write to each other. Primrose wondered what Micky would say. It would be time to tell him when he came home.

Mary had to confide in Mitchie, who snorted.

" I cannot decide," said Mary, " whether pity or love has brought this about."

" Neither. Curiosity."

" Mitchie, I wonder if you are right."

" The besetting sin of sex. I suffered from it myself, as I told Prim years ago. I think, I am nearly sure, that you, as a girl, were not curious."

" Certainly I restrained my curiosities."

" There is a reason for this," said Mitchie, after a pause, " which may have escaped you. I believe that Primrose fell ears over head in love with Micky——"

" You absurd old Mitchie——"

" Wait. A sensitive child is subject to suggestion. We suggested to her something romantic quite unwittingly. We felt so sorry for her. Micky was not presented as a brother. He dubbed himself knight. That pleased us—and him. I

called him, I remember, the *preux chevalier*. She was his fayre lady."

" Yes."

" A grain of mustard seed falling on teeming soil. Something is tickling my memory. What? I have it. Just before the War, she questioned me about St. Pierre's silly book. She saw herself as Virginia; she wanted to see him as Paul. I hoped that I had nipped a mild attack of calf-love in the bud. But I am doubtful now."

" There may be something in it. Micky never saw himself as Paul."

" True. She is a dear little sister to him. That fact may have festered with her. And if so, one can understand this unhappy affair."

" It might turn out happily."

" I wish I could think so. This war has debased our moral coinage, cheapened love. It is certain that men prize what is hard to get. The right sort of love is hard to get—and hard to keep. When love is thrown at men in chunks, they gobble it up—and ask for more. *L'appétit vient en mangeant.* Ah—ah! You are not thinking of Prim, but of Micky. You are asking: Will love be thrown at him?"

" You are always too sharp for me. I was thinking of that."

They began to talk of Michael, who might appear at any moment. After six months of independence, subject only to army discipline, would he go willingly to Oxford? Would the "dreaming spires" of that ancient seat of learning allure him? Impossible to say. The War had unsettled the boy, dislocated a mother's cherished plans. He had spent a year, when Winky went to France, at a school for delicate youths with whom he had little in common. The Principal reported that Michael Lynn could work hard at what interested him, that his abilities were much above the average, that he seemed to be thoroughly well grounded in the humanities. Satisfactory, so far as it went. His love of Natural History remained. Mary alone knew, because she had his confidence, that he was intolerably restless, quite capable—had she not lifted a restraining finger—of enlisting.

## V

He came back to East Sussex with the daffodils. Both Mary and Primrose acclaimed a glorious change in his physique. At last he had "furnished up": tall, sinewy, bronzed by exposure, every inch a man. His laugh rang out delightfully; his grey-blue eyes, set well apart, sparkled with animation; he was, as he expressed it, full of beans. He could drive any make of car anywhere, but he declared himself "fed up" with machinery. Half an hour after his arrival he was racing round the gardens and ponds with Primrose . . .

Hard by an old pollard where he had found his first missel-thrush's nest (with addled eggs), Primrose called a halt. She wanted to tell him her great news—and get it over. She had rehearsed her "lines," but forgot them, blurting out the bare fact:

"I say, Mick, I'm engaged to be married."

He took this as a joke.

"So am I, poppet."

"You aren't——!"

"Well, I ought to be. Three French girls made googly eyes at me."

"Mick, I'm not joking. Listen. If you laugh I shall hate you."

He listened attentively enough, frowning at her, incredulous, not exactly jealous, but sensible that he no longer ranked first, a pill for any brother to swallow. When she finished, he lit a cigarette.

"Is this practical politics?" he asked.

"We think so. He is going to get well. Micky, won't you kiss me?"

He kissed her, thinking to himself: "This is blithering tommy-rot," but he said not too graciously:

"How can I congratulate you till I meet him?"

"You will. He is coming here, when he's strong enough."

"On appro?"

"You are beastly; and I—I thought you would be sweet to me."

"Poor little Prim!"

He caught her to him and hugged her.

"There ! Is that better ? "

"Yes. I can talk to you now and tell you everything. He writes me the loveliest letters. Mum and you think me a baby, but I shall be eighteen come Michaelmas."

"My festival."

"So it is ; I'd never thought of that. Mick, it's heavenly to be in love."

"Is it ? "

"You funny boy ! Haven't you ever had a ' pash ' ? "

"No."

"And you are a year older than I am."

"Prim—you're back in a pram. Honest now, just between our two little selves, how did all this come about ? There was no ' walking out,' no jolly larks together ; you weren't his nurse ; he was desperately ill. A man doesn't make love when he thinks himself dying. I'm a bit rattled. Before you say a word, I'll say this about myself. I've had a flirtation or two. I know what it feels like to feel—to feel that it would be—how shall I put it ?—yes ; *exciting* to kiss a girl, who—who *wanted* to be kissed. Some do ; some don't. And then if a girl expects to be kissed, a fellow feels such a fool if he doesn't kiss her. Perhaps I'm different from the boy who must have a girl, any girl, to play about with. I—I don't think about girls. I—I hate to talk about girls in that sort of cheap way. I like to think, Prim, when I do think about it, that somewhere there is a darling, fresh as dew, who is growing up for me, who will be mine some day. But, Lordy ! there's such a lot to do first. I have to make good ; I loathe the idea of mucking about, playing at being a man, which simply means playing the fool. Now, I've jawed enough about myself. It's your turn. Do you remember we used to play 'swops' ? " He laughed. " Sometimes I invented a secret, so as to squeeze a secret out of you. Tell me, Prim, how you came to fall in love with this man, and how he came to fall in love with you—— ? "

" You are a darling, Micky."

" I'm a bag o' mystery, so are you ; we all are. Put the old 'bus into gear. Speed up ! "

She took her time. They were standing near the two-acre pond at the bottom of the garden, where they had set night lines for eels. Somewhere, rotting in the weeds, was the raft that they had made. The place smelt sweet of their childhood, sweet of the spring of the year. They were sheltered from the wind.

Prim sat down upon a bank where a few adventurous primroses had lit their lamps ; Micky sat beside her and took her soft hand in his. His own hands were scarred, not yet free from engrained French soil ; his fingernails were still stained and ragged. Prim, leaning against him, could feel his muscles hard beneath his sleeve.

She told an artless tale, convincing to Micky because it was so free from verbal embellishment. She managed, more by the inflections of her voice than by actual words, to make him understand her craving for love. Behind that was the impulse for ministration. She had not enough experience to "nurse" anybody. The trained nurses spoke to her of this man as a hero and a "perfect dear," patient under cruel suffering. Before she met him, thought of him filled her imaginative mind. Then, one day, she was asked to read aloud to him. That was something she could do well. At his request, she read passages from the poets and isolated chapters out of famous novels. He had been greedy for Arcadia, for descriptions of quiet woodlands and happy valleys. He refused to speak of the War, or of what he had done in France. But the nurses knew. And the nurses had been generous enough to admit that she, a sort of maid-of-all-work, could "help" him, that she, such a negligible "she," could do her "bit" for him. Under the spell of her voice, he would fall asleep. . . . Presently he came to her in her dreams. . . .

"And you know, Micky, I believe in my dreams."

"Go on. I've linked up so far. I suppose his want of you, as a charmer away of pain, bucked you up tremendously. Is he good-looking ?"

"He has a fine head. When it lay on the pillow I couldn't think, I—I didn't want to think, of anything else."

"I'm reading your map, Prim. You must have travelled

a rough road. I've got it clearly enough that you were off the beaten track. I—I think I can understand you, but him—! Damn it all, a man who is a man doesn't make love to a kind little girl who reads aloud to him."

" Some do."

" What—?"

" If you heard the nurses talking about that—— Perhaps it's like a man asking for sausages and mashed just before he's going to be hanged ; perhaps they are crazy mad to go out of the world with a sweet taste in their mouth. But he—he *didn't* make love to me. I—I made love to him. You won't tell Mum ? "

" Not on your life ! "

" I believe I can tell you almost anything. Micky, I knew that he loved me, although he wouldn't make love. And I had to go home ; I—I thought I should never see him again. We were alone in a crowd, but the screens were round him. If they hadn't been, I shouldn't have cared. I came to say good-bye. He put out his hand and looked at me. And he seemed to be saying : ' When you go, I go.' I bent down and kissed him. I—I told him to get well for me ; I told him that I was his if he wanted me. I had to whisper it ; and then he said solemnly : ' By God ! I will get well.' I had just time to tell him that I would tell Mum, that I considered myself engaged to him, that I would be his wife if—if he lived." She ended triumphantly : " And he's going to live."

" That was all ? "

" I haven't seen him since."

Michael remained silent, thinking furiously. He was unaware that a great privilege had been his, not undeserved. A maiden had shown him her heart, a vision vouchsafed to few young men. It was not his fault that he saw it through his own mists, dimly, amorphously. What was virile in him protested instinctively against the " sickliness " of this love affair. It wasn't " right " for little Prim. It had a smell of carbolic about it, the more pungent because in his eager nostrils were all the odours of Spring. He looked across the pond, to the oast-houses topping the hill beyond ; and thence

to the hop gardens below. He could see the water meadows and the Frisian-Holstein cows. The familiarity of the landscape made it hard to believe that his playmate, still regarded as an innocent child, had told him this poignant story. Poignant it was to him, intensely moving, but unsatisfying, a bad beginning. How would it end ?

## VI

Arthur Wharton came to Frodsham about the middle of April. It is enough to say that he disarmed criticism. He looked and was a gentleman. Mary, you may be sure, had found out all about him. Before the War, he would have been called "eligible" by match-making mammas ; he had ample means—and expectations from a bachelor uncle, a many-acred squire. His parents were dead. . . .

He limped, actually and metaphorically, into acquaintance with Mary and Mitchie, being shy and undemonstrative. He was utterly unlike the typical Guardsman in or out of fiction. Yet he had been to Sandhurst, and was gazetted to the Grenadiers before the outbreak of war. He would never serve in his regiment again ; he could never hope to be a robust man ; but he might, so a specialist assured him, make old bones, if—if he kept himself in cotton wool. . . .

Primrose beamed at him.

Obviously he adored her.

Mary duly noted that this distinguished soldier treated Primrose reverentially. Winky's word came back with bitter-sweet memories of his honest rueful face, his deprecating smile, the smile of the "rabbit." She wondered if a little hedonist could be happy with a valetudinarian. For the moment, Prim was satisfied. She didn't *want* to get married. With her lover she was at her best, so Mary thought. She went on reading aloud to him in the garden, and he absorbed God's sunshine and her smiles.

Micky—let it be frankly stated—was not prepared to like Wharton ; and yet he "cottoned" to him at sight, and within forty-eight hours accepted him as an elder brother.

Perhaps the most important result of this long visit was the eager acceptance of Wharton as guide, philosopher, and friend by a boy who had never made a great friend. Wharton appealed to Micky's imagination. *He had done things.* He "stood for" all that had been denied to a home-keeping youth : Eton—Sandhurst—London. Micky tried to "under-study" him, and failed ignominiously, defeated by Prim's laughter and sly quips from Mitchie.

"Be yourself," said Mitchie.

To Wharton Micky propounded the eternal question :

"What shall I do?"

"What can you do?"

"Oh, nearly anything I like—fairly well."

After a few days, Wharton said quietly :

"You have the *wanderlust*."

A new word to Micky. Wharton explained it.

"The Call of the Wild, Arthur."

"Too free a translation. Some wanderers, thinking of their skins, are careful to keep out of the wild."

Together they pored over maps.

It was Wharton who persuaded Mary to abandon the idea of sending Micky to Oxford.

"You must have the courage of your convictions."

"I beg your pardon?"

"You tried a great experiment. It seems to have succeeded. Micky is an original. He might be an awful prig. He's a man's man brought up by two women ; he's clean ; he's free from affection. I don't see him at Oxford."

"Where do you see him?"

"Ask me that later on. He would like to go back to France. He wants to jabber French. Miss Mitchell has given him a good accent. French, Mrs. Lynn, carries a man everywhere ; it's a passport into any society."

"But why is he keen to jabber French?"

"Geographical."

"You puzzle me."

"He wants to visit the French colonies as a naturalist ; he wants to study Natural History in Paris—no better place, but Paris at the moment—"

" Yes ? "

" Is not the spot I should choose for a younger brother. Paris is celebrating. Paris is painting itself shrimp pink."

" You are a great help to me, Arthur."

" I want to do the little I can."

" You have great influence with my son."

He began to talk diffidently of the youth of England ; and the national pastime of ramming square pegs into round holes, a recreation particularly dear to country gentlemen and ladies : Tom ear-marked from the cradle to be a soldier ; Bill, if there was a living in the gift of the family, for the Church ; Bob, the boy with the brains, for the Bar. So cut-and-dried ! So easy from the parental point of view ! Wharton's delicate irony, one of his characteristics, played lambentily upon his theme. Mary listened, nodding her head. Every word rang true. Every word lacerated sensibilities. She had hoped and prayed that her square peg would find a square hole in London. Then she would sell the manor, and move out of the Land of Nod. There had been wild talk of farming—— ! Farmers became prosperous during the War. But even Mitchie, case-hardened Londoner, spoke of the farmer as the historical fool, putting good money into the ground with Fortune's dice loaded against him. In her opinion a " gentleman " farmer was a pitiable object. But, surely, in London Micky could find congenial work. He had aptitudes for writing, but where was his experience ? He might do well in journalism. . . .

In conclusion Wharton paid a tribute to an unselfish mother, which warmed her heart.

" Micky knows what he owes you, Mrs. Lynn. With any pressure from you, he will tackle any job *you* fancy for him."

She said, with a sigh, that she was incapable of using pressure.

" You are so wise to let him try to find his own path, even if it takes him from you."

Finally, it was decided that the boy should return to France.

## CHAPTER X

### PRIMROSE

#### I

**A**BOUT the middle of May, Wharton went north, still sadly crippled. His engagement to Miss Cheverton was announced in the papers. Immediately, Felicia Norman, and other relations of Primrose, wanted to know *everything*. Primrose spent a fortnight with her aunt in London, meeting several cousins and, incidentally, her trustees. What she said to them can only be surmised. What they said to her was probably non-committal and tactful. The match from a worldly point of view was all that could be desired. Primrose, artful little baggage, wheedled out of two elderly gentlemen a grant in aid, a handsome cheque to be expended on frocks and frills, bought under Aunt Felicia's supervision. All this was great "fun," wildly "thrilling." But it happened that Felicia's daughter, Phyllis, much older than Primrose—and like her in many ways—had made a "war" marriage, taking for better or worse a wounded "hero," not heroic in the piping times of peace, simply because he was unable to dance to the universal piping. His wife wanted to fox-trot—and she did. Primrose paid Phyllis a visit after she left her aunt's flat. Again we can only guess at what passed between a wife who hated to play "nurse" and a young girl who might have to do it later on. Phyllis had married (in haste) a comparatively poor man. They lived in a small house in Chelsea in a chronic state of domestic flux, in debt to petty tradesmen, at the mercy of two inexperienced servant maids. They had tried the country for six months, where the wounded hero gave intermittent attention to a chicken farm, a kennel of Sealyham terriers, and a kitchen garden. He failed humiliatingly to adjust means

to ends in these three enterprises, returning to London much disgusted, but sustained by the conviction that if money couldn't be picked up in Hampshire it might be saved in Chelsea. . . .

Part of Prim's cheque found its way into her cousin's pocket. Prim couldn't bear to see discomfort; discomfort, apart from a brief experience in the hospital, was disconcerting. In Mary's well-ordered establishment there had never been discomfort in the form of endless wrangles with pert maids, bickerings over weekly bills, everlasting friction over trifles. *But Phyllis had married for love—!*

Felicia couldn't help much. She was outspoken to Primrose about both her children. The boy, Gilbert, had served in the War, and had broken down from exposure in 1917. A clerkship had been found for him on the Stock Exchange, where he might or might not do well. Felicia held no views about business, being a business woman. She had pulled strings to get Gilbert his billet; he lived with her; now he was "on his own"—sink or swim. Magnates, old friends of his unfortunate father, promised to help a young fellow if he helped himself. At any rate, for the moment, Gilbert was not causing his lively mummie undue anxiety. She told him that if he wanted a good time, he must earn it. . . .

Phyllis had made her own bed.

Long afterwards Felicia told Mary that she had encouraged Prim to spend a week with Phyllis because experience might open the eyes of inexperience.

At first, Primrose was amused and entertained. She came into intimate contact with a number of happy-go-lucky young people saturated with the post-war spirit. Night-clubs were of the first importance. The talk, such as it was, struck her as "hectic." It appeared to be "mouldy" to talk seriously about anything. And yet the talk did froth and bubble about subjects held to be very serious indeed by Mary and Mitchie. For instance—the sanctity of the marriage tie. There seemed to be no sanctity about Holy Matrimony in Chelsea. You could do without it, if you liked, and perhaps, a "trial trip," a week-end by the river, might be "illuminating."

Gilbert, urged by Felicia to be cousinly to Prim, tried to explain Chelsea to a country mouse.

" You see, we've been shell-shocked out of being shocked. Rightly considered nothing is shocking. You blushed when birth-control cropped up at dinner. My God ! It ought to be preached from every pulpit in the land."

" Bertie——!"

" Blinds are up. Doesn't Romeo talk plainly to you ? "

" N-no. I'm jolly glad he doesn't."

Gilbert had not met Major Wharton, but he understood that he was something of a " swell"—out of the top drawer.

" You and he can afford to have a quiverful, but Phyllis—and these other strivers living on tuppence-ha'penny a year—What price their babies when they aren't wanted ? "

After a time Prim ceased blushing. She wondered if Micky and Arthur would disapprove of the company she was keeping. . . .

She was virtuously shocked and indignant when two young married men attempted to kiss her, but Gilbert, whom she regarded with affection, said with a laugh :

" Bless your virginal heart, they were only keeping their hands in. A compliment in its way to you. Why get waxy ? Say : ' Paws off ! ' and smile. I'll bet you mewed at 'em."

" I—I didn't."

" I'll bet you knew they were Toms on the tiles."

" I hated them at sight."

" Instinctive ! But you girlie-girls are such teasers, you ask for trouble——"

" I don't. How dare you say so ! "

" Keep cool, my pet. I say what comes into my head ; I'm for plain speech—saves a lot of misunderstanding in the end."

" I'm sorry, Bertie. I *am* fond of you."

" You're an innocent ; and innocence is very fetching in this market."

## II

From Chelsea, Primrose travelled into the Dukeries, to make the acquaintance of the head of the family, General Wharton, Arthur's bachelor uncle, the many-acred squire. Miss Wharton, the General's sister, kept house for the veteran.

Arthur met his *fiancée* at Retford.

"What a butterfly!" he exclaimed.

"Did you think me a grub? Do you like my new hat?"

He glanced at it perfunctorily, saying fatuously for him: "You'd be sweet in anything, darling."

"But I do look smart, don't I?"

"Smart? Yes; that's the word, but it doesn't cut ice with me."

In the big saloon car, as they sped swiftly on their way to what would be their future home, Wharton murmured a few cautionary words:

"They're old dears. I hope you won't be bored. My uncle is something of a hermit, not carpet-slippery, but cribbed and cabined by his own tastes and habits which are Victorian. He was a buck in his day—and a Guardsman. He insisted upon my joining the Brigade."

"You didn't want to?"

"I didn't quite know what I wanted. I was plastic enough to my uncle's hand. You will be welcomed warmly."

The house was imposing, standing in a large park, with a lake in front of a terraced garden. Mitchie would have described it as "grandiose."

The General received her with old-fashioned courtesy, standing upright and bare-headed at his front door. He had a charming smile, pervasive, kindly, but not humorous. Gilbert would have said: "One of the old lads of the village." Behind him hovered a butler and a footman.

"Your Aunt Priscilla," said the General to Primrose, "is in the drawing-room. I'm afraid that it smells of eucalyptus; my sister has a cold in the head; she is terrified that you may catch it."

The General's paternal kiss, his allusion to his sister as

Prim's aunt, soaped the ways. Prim was conscious of sliding into snug harbourage ; she was conscious too of leaving far behind familiar landmarks. She had never met "swells." From Arthur, who spoke casually about them, she learned that she might encounter—dukes, excitingly terrifying ! Mitchie and Mary had purged her of any taint of snobbery, but like all young people who have never met noblemen of high degree Primrose believed that they were different from commoners.

Aunt Priscilla refused to kiss her new niece, but fussed over her in an atmosphere in which pot-pourri and eucalyptus contended for the mastery. Eucalyptus had the best of it. The General stood upon the hearth-rug, looking like a Field-Marshal upon the field of battle. He went on smiling at Primrose, thinking to himself : " This little lady is captivating ; the boy has picked a winner ; her portrait must be painted. Yes, yes ; all is well, all is very well."

Sweet seventeen was impressed by this cordial and courtly reception. She had to "play up," and it amused her to do so. It would be too harsh to say bluntly that she set herself to sustain a part not natural to her, but, being a jolly healthy girl, she wanted to please, and it was so easy to please these new "relations" if you rubbed their fur the right way—and smiled back at them. Her smile had quality. Long ago Micky had accused her of aping Mitchie's smile, which she denied indignantly. Nevertheless it is likely that she had learned from Mitchie that smiles can be too cheap, and that a smile should come from within. It flickered slowly to her pretty lips ; a dimple indented itself ; then her eyes, peeping out from between long lashes, would begin to sparkle ; the lips would curve and part, as if reluctantly, displaying small white teeth. At this stage in the proceedings a laugh might trickle out, merriment demurely suppressed. Finally, with disconcerting swiftness the smile would vanish, leaving the face not grave but immobile. This parlour trick was baffling to young men. The smile seemed to say : " I am amused, but buck up, make a more sustained effort to provoke more smiles." As Gilbert remarked : " Fetching ! "

Miss Wharton was the typical, laid-in-lavender old maid, now nearly extinct. She lived to please the General ; she took for granted that Primrose would live to please her future husband. Patting Prim's hand, after insisting upon waving an antiseptic handkerchief between her nose and Prim's, she said ingratiatingly : " We are going to have such nice long talks together."

Tea was served, a solemn ritual.

Aunt Priscilla's slender white hands hovered over the tea equipage, a Queen Anne service. She hoped that Prim preferred China tea with a pinch of Orange Pekoe in it ; perhaps the child would like a poached egg after her long journey ; dinner would not be served till eight-fifteen——

" To the tick," interpolated the General.

In Phyllis's house nothing was served " to the tick." Some of her young friends declared that they ate when they were hungry " at any old hour " ; some insisted that an up-to-date house should be regarded as a hotel for one's friends ; if you craved for cold beef at three in the morning, why not have it ? Phyllis's house, moreover, was a colour scheme on the daring side, sable and amethyst—which suited the fair-haired Phyllis. The sitting-room was a stage setting. Admittedly Phyllis had taste. She looked forward to helping Primrose (1) in the selection of a house, (2) in its reconstruction and decoration, (3) in the buying of furniture. When Primrose protested : " I don't know that we are going to live in London," Phyllis replied : " The sooner you make up *his* mind about that the better. Where else could you live, I mean *live* ? " The pair had many talks about localities. Phyllis knew her London. There were houses near Regent's Canal, in and about Westminster, or at Hampstead, although Hampstead was inconveniently distant from Chelsea. But, of course, Mrs. Arthur Wharton would have a closed car, which would make things easy for her friends. Phyllis waxed impatient and slightly contemptuous when Primrose admitted that these important matters had not been discussed with the man who would have to pay the bills. No date had been set, even approximately, for the wedding. Then Phyllis wondered what an engaged couple

talked about when they were alone. Prim, distressingly sensible that she looked and felt a little fool, could not satisfy her cousin's curiosities. *Actually she didn't know what Arthur "had."* Phyllis, although she had never met Arthur, dealt with him and his future faithfully. Arthur *must* go into the House of Awfully Commons, and make it less awful. Prim would push his fortunes, entertain delightfully, and cultivate "publicity."

It sounded so easy.

At Wharton Hall, in a less breezy air, the future became background instead of foreground. Arthur, for one, was living in the present. He had come back, miraculously, to life and all that made life worth living. He looked upon Primrose as his saviour, an angel. To attain to his standard of her challenged what was best in the girl. She was unaware that she was swinging between two poles immeasurably apart : pre-War and post-War conditions, both magnets. She had been well educated, and so far environment prevailed over heredity. Her upbringing by Mary and Mitchie had scotched, not killed, Cheverton disabilities. Her lover was amazed at her general knowledge, her quick intelligence, her critical faculties sharpened by Mitchie. He never suspected that she was an echo. . . .

### III

The General, capitulating at sight, took Prim to his heart, which lay perilously near his stomach. He had rationed himself (and others) rigorously during the War ; now he was "doing himself well," although he grumbled when he paid weekly bills and glared at rising prices. There had been nearly twenty years between him and Arthur's father ; he had been too old to serve in the War, except as a "dug-out." To the astonishment of Primrose, who had never met his like, he was Germanophile. He maintained obstinately that England long before the War should have allied herself with Germany, not with France. He spoke of France as the hereditary enemy, femininely capricious and unreliable.

England and Germany together might have ruled Europe well and wisely ; instead Europe was in chaos. He dismissed disdainfully the sanguine hope that any war could end war, human nature being what it is. He was cynical about the League of Nations. Within half an hour Primrose realised his cleverness, his obstinacy, and his possession of a remarkable memory. He had known intimately the great men of his day.

In fine, she was " up against " a personality.

With Arthur, she talked about books. Books had drawn them together. Wharton Hall held many books, not merely ornamental. It held too trophies of the Chase, good and bad pictures, porcelain, pottery, weapons, Victorian furniture, and the thickest of carpets. No colour scheme ! No sense of " values." The General had been an ardent collector. He collected what took his fancy ; his own possessions were sacrosanct. An enormous head of a wapiti overshadowed a " gem " by Fragonard. The Fragonard was a cherished heirloom ; the General had shot the wapiti. In the hall foxes' masks distracted attention from lovely mezzotints. Between two portraits of favourite hunters hung a delicate Cosway drawing——!

What would Phyllis say ?

Arthur observed, with that tinge of melancholy irony which often troubled his *fiancée* :

" What is—is."

He refused in the same spirit to discuss his uncle.

" We must take him as we find him. You've made a hit. He's sent for the family diamonds."

" Arthur ! You funny boy ! This is the first time you've mentioned them."

" Is it ? They're nothing to write home about, but good Brazilian stones, I believe. He talks of handing them over to you on our wedding-day ; and he thought you might like to take a squint at them."

" I should think I should."

" The tiara will need resetting ; it would look a club-fender on your darling little head."

She gasped.

"There is a *tiara*—?"

"Oh yes. My mother wore it at Court functions. There are some pearls, too."

"But—how madly thrilling!"

He smiled at her, unable to read her thoughts.

It was incredible (to her) that a matter of tremendous interest should have cropped up, as if it were a misdirected letter. Why did he have such strange reticences about the Wharton possessions? Did they mean nothing to him? He had been really excited when they found, rummaging about in the library, a first edition of *Endymion*.

#### IV

The General and Miss Wharton considered Primrose to be marriage-ripe. An old campaigner, when speaking of potential wives, said: "Catch 'em young." This, of course, was the selfish attitude. A young girl could be trained like a spaniel. The General refused to discuss disturbers of the common peace like suffragettes and suffragists. *They* had unsexed themselves. Still, he had a sense of historical perspective, and could quote (in English) from the *Lysistrata*. What had been in the days of Aristophanes recurred periodically after all upheavals. Kirk, kitchen, and kindergarten ought to engross the activities of women. As Squire, he read one of the Lessons in church sonorously. He wore a silk hat when he marched to the village church on Sundays. As he sat upright in the loose box serving as family pew, he inspected the congregation, holding attendance at Divine Service to be an act of allegiance to a Personal Deity, whom he beheld as Commander-in-Chief. . . .

Primrose met dukes and belted earls. They were astonishingly like other people, but with a greater knack of putting at ease strangers within their lordly gates. She decided that they differed from the squires and squireens of East Sussex in one point only: they had a wider range. They were on the "inside." In a vague, pleasant fashion, they made Primrose understand that she too was on the "inside"—

accepted by them as a future co-worker in and for the "county." She had humour enough to contrast what Phyllis "expected" of her with the implied, never stated, expectations of Whartons and people like them. Phyllis voiced the paramount claim of the individual. *Noblesse oblige* meant nothing to her. In the Dukeries the claims of the individual were not shouted. She was surprised and flattered when a Knight of the Garter whispered : " You know, my dear, I am so happy when I can plead some trifling indisposition as an excuse for staying in my room and having a 'tray,' a nice little tray, with a chop and a pint of light lager." Primrose thought : " Gracious ! If you can't have that whenever you like, what can you have ? " His wife, one of the greatest ladies in the kingdom, and a sometime "beauty" further confounded the future Mrs. Arthur Wharton by saying : " I wish I could see more of you, but really I never do what I like." Sincerity informed her clear tones. When Prim repeated this to Arthur, he shrugged his shoulders, remarking : " Everybody knows that it takes a lot of trouble to be a duke. Our neighbour is really the unpaid administrator of his vast property ; and the Duchess is his unpaid private secretary."

The nice long talks with Aunt Priscilla took place each morning, when Arthur was busy with the General dealing with estate management. Arthur was chief of staff. The General issued his orders in no uncertain terms ; his nephew and heir saw to it that they were obeyed.

Aunt Priscilla talked with Primrose, but not at her, as Phyllis did. This dear old lady couldn't lay down the law, as her brother did ; she repeated her simple *credo* with pathetic faith in all its clauses. She took for granted that Primrose would "do" exactly what she had done. From Miss Wharton Primrose first gleaned the surprising news that she and Arthur might be asked to occupy the Dower House, kept in apple-pie order for Miss Wharton against the time when the General would be gathered to his fathers. The General, with increasing infirmities, depended more and more upon his nephew, couldn't really do without him. And now, alas ! Miss Wharton's activities as lady of a great

manor were inexorably diminishing. It would be so nice to transfer some of her burdens to young shoulders.

It was impossible to argue about this. Whartons were proof against argument which might in any way conflict with what they deemed to be duty. They didn't talk about doing their duty ; they did it.

Aunt Priscilla knew—and so did the General—that this dear little lady had raised the hope of the family from the dust. Arthur had assured them of this solemnly. Her innocent love for a “wreck” had resparred him. Thanks to her he was afloat in blue water, actually sailing the high seas with favouring gales astern. The assumption that Prim's love for her lover was the real right thing underlay all these nice long talks. Each night, kneeling beside her bed, Aunt Priscilla thanked God for Primrose. . . .

However, the mention of the Dower House led immediately to a talk with Arthur.

“Do you *want* to live at the Dower House ? ” she asked.

He replied quickly :

“If *you* wanted it. I—I have marked time, Prim. I'm hardly on my legs yet. I have to consider this : *what can I do ?* ”

For the first time she spoke of the House of Commons.

“Can you see me there ? ” he asked, with a derisive chuckle.

Prim, wafted on the wings of fancy and fortified by faith in his abilities, could see Arthur as a Cabinet Minister, whose closed car, as Phyllis pointed out, would not be “held up” in congested traffic.

“Of course I can. Phyllis says that if the gentlemen of England *don't* go into Parliament, there will soon be no gentlemen left.”

“Phyllis says that, does she ? Did your cousin suggest that I should stand for Parliament ? ”

“Yes.”

“Does she know that I can't stand without crutches ? ”

“A man stands for Parliament, but he takes his seat when he gets there.”

“Top marks, Prim. Arthur Wharton, M.P.”

"The Right Honourable Major Wharton, P.C., M.P., D.S.O., M.C."

"Add R.S.V.P. and P.P.C."

"I'm ever so serious, darling. Why not?"

"I could give you half a dozen *cons*; one will suffice. I am disqualified from taking on a job that exacts unflagging energies of mind and body."

An older girl would have known that he was not speaking colloquially on the spur of the moment. His answer had been thought out. Indeed, he used much the same words when writing to the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, who had urged him to consider politics. He continued :

"I want to do what I can. I can serve on the County Council, on the Bench, and keep an eye on the parish pump."

"All that would mean living at the Dower House——?"

"Yes—if that suited you."

Invariably his quiet consideration evoked a sweet response—kisses and caresses reverentially accepted. He held her to be porcelain. He had never rent in twain the veil in her temple of modesty; he loved "bloom," cherished it, and with it the hallowed conviction that she, at any rate, had not been war-soiled. He would speak to her, with no tinge of irony, of what she owed to Mary, whom he venerated as a "wonder." He thought Mitchie a paragon of a teacher. They had *made* Prim what she appeared to be to him and his friends—an alert, intelligent, unselfish, modest maid, not a "daisy," but a flower of Spring—a Narcissa. Everybody assured him that he was the luckiest of men. . . .

The Dower House was left, for the moment, in its old-fashioned isolation. But Aunt Priscilla took Primrose over it. The General and she had "done it up," and Prim dared not hint that they had "done it in." No expense had been spared. The inside decoration and the furnishings were so exactly "right" for Miss Wharton, such an epitome of her taste, that it would have been impertinent for any young woman to attempt even the mildest criticism! Could youth slap the delicate cheek of age? Any indictment of plush curtains and gilt cornices, of yellow, varnished oak, of overmantels, of Lincrusta Walton, and other "atrocities," would

be taken personally. Prim held her tongue and laughed, because she was on the verge of tears.

"I love to hear your trickling little laugh," said Aunt Priscilla.

## V

The "tiara," and the necessity of having it reset, provoked a natural question from Primrose.

"If I shall never wear it——?"

She said this when she was alone with Arthur, upon the night when the family diamonds were sent from London. They had lain for many years in the strong room of Messrs. Corwen and Rappington, of Bond Street. No less a personage than the butler fetched them from Mayfair. The General spoke of them as "trinkets" and "gewgaws," flipping thumb and finger at them. Nevertheless the ecstatic "Ohs" of Miss Prim, as he liked to call her, pleased him immensely. . . .

"Never wear it——?" repeated Arthur blankly. "What do you mean, my precious?"

Timidly, Miss Prim explained what she meant. Tiaras were not worn in the country.

"You will be presented at Court on your marriage; we shall pop up to London in the season; there will be Hunt balls down here."

"It—it seems hardly worth while having it reset for only that."

Something in her tone may have warned him that Wharton ways might not be altogether Cheverton ways.

"We have not had a house in London since my grandfather's time. My uncle sold a barrack in Bryanston Square. You know, Prim, how I hate to talk of the time when the old boy, who has been so jolly and generous to me, takes his long leave. There are signs, I'm afraid, that his innings is drawing to a close. He had to give up hunting before the War; he gave up shooting during the War. Now, there isn't very much left but his glass of port and the flesh-pots. He stoutly refuses to put the muzzle on. Rather sporting

of him ! He ' carries on ' ; and he means to carry on till he's carried out. For the few years that are left to him, I must play the game, his game. Afterwards——”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I may be a different man, more able to give you what I want to give you—a jolly good time. You have seen for yourself that our swells don't have too good a time. Incomes have been cut in half. This socialistic twaddle about the idle rich is a political slogan. Where *are* the idle rich ? The war-profiteers are swanking, chucking their ill-gotten gains about—beggars on horseback ! But the gentlemen of England are neither idle nor rich. Being gentlemen they don't whine. They know that the War must be paid for. And the less said about it, the better. Actions count, not words.”

He kissed her tenderly.

She told herself that it was good to have such a man. Aunt Felicia, not Mary, had said something (very little) about Sir Rupert Cheverton. Felicia, being Felicia, and happily able to forget dreary yesterdays, shrank from the task of blackening the character of a dead man. But she was not proof against Prim's inquisitions. Prim had guessed that there was a skeleton hanging out of sight in a dusty cupboard. Mum had always talked to Micky about his father. Major Lynn to the son who had never seen him was a flesh-and-blood personality, a source of pride, an example. Why did Mum never speak of *her* father, whom she had seen, whom she remembered dimly as a romping playmate ? Driven to the wall, Felicia had to tackle her job with what courage and tact she could muster. Primrose must find out the truth some day. Mary Lynn would have presented it starkly. She intended to do so when the time came. Felicia forestalled her. Half the truth never satisfies curiosities. Primrose understood that she was the daughter of a man who had wrecked a fine career by intemperance and weakness. To smooth matters, Felicia spoke of her own husband, and the tragedy of his death. Primrose, pale and trembling, with tears trickling down her cheeks, listened in silence, unable to speak because she guessed that Aunt Felicia didn't wish her to speak.

The scene ended with anti-climax. An optimist said "I started the hat shop." Primrose nearly burst into hysterical laughter, but her plucky aunt continued cheerily : "Put bygones out of your mind. Your father was a dear till he —you know ! He had charming manners, as you have. You get that from him ; and you have his cleverness. Don't let this wretched story upset you. Men are men. Leave it at that, darling."

*Leave it at that——!*

Would Mary Lynn, or Mitchie, have left it at that ? One can conceive all that a sensible woman would not have left unsaid, the kindly warnings, the wise counsel, the brave handling of inexorable facts. Weakness would have gathered strength from Mary and Mitchie—and courage. . . .

Primrose, ever subject to suggestion, attempted to "leave it at that." She accepted her sprightly aunt's philosophical summing-up. Her father's weakness became remote. It was far more agreeable to think of him as Prince Charming, clever and handsome, popular almost to the last.

R.I.P.

## VI

Meanwhile Micky was in France, roaming about Brittany with a knapsack on his back. He wrote long letters to Prim, brimming over with high spirits and joy in life. . . .

More contrast.

The girl found herself wondering whether or not she wanted to be with Micky, tramping dusty roads in his merry, boyish company, swigging cider at wayside inns, bathing in woodland pools, moving on and on from village to village, "wallowing" (his word) in fresh surroundings, chaffing all and sundry, warmed to the core by Flaming June, speeded on his way by smiling *patronnes and bonnes*, lingering beside Calvaries, taking part in the "Pardons" of the ancient province, happier—so he assured Prim—than he had ever been, "finding himself," so he affirmed, and repeating again and again : "How you would love to be with me."

Primrose showed these letters to Arthur, who was keenly interested in the boy's vagabondage. But he had never done anything of the sort himself—much to his regret, be it added. He had "wangled" for Micky this joyous holiday. Had he known that his little Primrose had seen Micky as "Paul," that as a child she had hugged passionately to her tiny bosom the hope that she would marry Micky some day, he might have been less enthusiastic about Mr. Michael Lynn.

He had faith that Michael would find a path leading to the Temple of Fame. He might try many paths. But, in the end, he would tread triumphantly the right path.

"He's labelled—winner."

"Is he? Why do you say that?"

"Because he has character, and the 'Get there' qualities."

"Arthur, tell me what you mean by 'character'?"

"Help!"

"I love to hear you talk about Micky, and you can talk so well. Somehow you get *inside* people. Is that a gift?"

"No. When I was knocked out, I had to get inside myself. But before that, in the trenches, I had to study others—my men. I could rely on some, but most of 'em relied on me. It became a point of honour to justify, if I could, Tommy's faith in his officer, and to uphold our *esprit de corps*. Oddly enough I have never tried to define character. I take it to be self-reverence. That is not quite the same as self-respect; it goes deeper; it has its roots in a belief in Providence. It means reverence for what is divine in us. I often think that the most poignant line ever written by Dickens was Steerforth's: 'Think of me at my best.' That line came from a great, pitiful heart, conscious of what was best and what was worst in himself. We are all pendulums; we swing between Heaven and Hell. Character may be an inheritance; it may be formed. But it can't be formed unless it's informed by a sense of direction. You can call it conscience or what you please. It is the instinct to go right instead of wrong. If young birds—I had this from Master Micky—can *precede* the old birds in

their flights across land and sea, we can reasonably believe that a child has the same infallible sense of direction. If a man likes to think of himself at his best, he has character. After that, unless he is a fool, he must think of himself at his worst. Then, and probably not till then, he takes into account all that governs his actions, good or bad. It's a bromide to tell you that character is development. It's the work of a lifetime ; it animates our thoughts, quite apart from our actions. I say that Micky has character, formed and informed. *He thinks.* He is not afraid to say what he thinks. I'm sure that he is honest with himself. Very few boys are. I wasn't. At Eton, and at Sandhurst, I accepted unthinkingly the standards of others. . . .”

He broke off abruptly, with a flush on his cheeks, conscious, possibly, that he might be boring a very young girl. She didn't look bored ; her cheeks also were flushed, but he could detect trouble in her eyes, which she lifted shyly to his.

“ I never heard a sermon like that, never ! What you say makes me think that perhaps you—you ought to have gone into the Church.”

He made no reply.

“ Have you ever wanted to do that ? ”

“ I—I don't know, Prim.”

“ If you thrilled me just now, you could thrill others. Mum is always saying that the right men keep out of the Church. You met old Mr. Hollywell. There are thousands just like him, and the younger men, well, they aren't the pick of the basket, are they ? Mitchie goes off the deep end over that.”

“ What does Mitchie say ? ”

“ She's furious because parsons, doctors, and teachers are ranked lower than ‘ county ’ people, like Sir George Royal. She lets herself r-rip over that. Micky and I used to egg her on, because she's splendid when she holds forth. Some old dames hate her when she climbs on to her battle-horse. Joan of Arc must have been like her. When we were children she was always talking about the triumph of brains over birth. And she says and believes that the best

brains ought to preach and teach. She's tremendously proud of being a teacher. She is not too happy as Mum's companion. And if she's right——”

“ Yes.”

Primrose hesitated.

“ Go on, sweetheart.”

“ No ; I can't go on. But, when you were speaking just now, I felt that you were miles above me, I—I felt that you ought to be saying to others what you were saying to me, helping them, forming their characters. You made me feel that I'm so unworthy of you——”

“ You dear little maid——”

“ You made me feel that I might be a hindrance to you, that you ought to have chosen a wife more like Mum. And then, and then, it all came back——”

“ What came back ? ”

“ That you *didn't* choose me ; I chose you. If Mum knew !—I kissed you first——”

“ Bless you ! ”

She burst into passionate tears. He tried to kiss them away. She clung to him, still sobbing. He heard her soft voice broken, but clearly articulate :

“ Kiss me harder, Arthur. Make me feel that I am yours, *yours*, that you want me desperately, and then I shall forget that I—I made you love me, because, b-because I w-w-wanted love.”

He was not a fool. He could recognise passion when it revealed itself, but habits of self-control remained paramount. She had aroused passion in him ; she was maddening, in the pressure of her sweet young body against his, but he regarded her as a blossom, whose petals had hardly yet unfolded. He dared not let himself go ; he had a vision of innocence recoiling, startled, frightened, bruised !

He crooned over her, till she released herself, faintly smiling, back to earth, glancing not at him but at her summer frock. Her laugh trickled out :

“ I'm all crumpled ; I must change before tea.”

## CHAPTER XI

### MICKY

#### I

MICKY had reached the heart of Brittany by the end of June. His objective was Quimper, where he intended to pay his respects to Saint Corentin, but he lingered in every village which took his fancy. The spirit of the province, which has found expression in the old *Barsaz Breiz*, and the verse of that troubadour, Théodore Botrel, took possession of his youthful heart. He wanted to jabber French, to try to think in French. According to Mitchie that was the only way to acquire fluent command of a foreign language. Then it ceased to be foreign. Men being lamentably absent Micky talked with the women. Regretfully, he was unable to talk with the old women, inasmuch as they spoke bad French and generally answered him in Breton. The younger women talked passable French. Girls were ubiquitous. Micky tramped the roads in their company and wagged his tongue gaily. In the roadside inns he was served by *bonnes* wearing the *coiffe* and collar of the commune. He could "place" them, but they couldn't "place" him. Was he an *artiste-peintre*, or a *littérateur romancier*? Did he walk because he was too poor to ride? Micky answered such questions banteringly, inflaming curiosity. He insisted that a faulty pronunciation and accent must be dealt with on the spot. The younger girls thought this great fun, the more so because Micky was lavish with tips. He was "getting on" famously. In the morning, when he heard a tap at his door, he said "*Entrez*" without pausing to reflect that it meant "come in." Ordinary salutations slipped out of his laughing mouth. At Huelgoat, he scraped acquaintance with Torin, the painter, who made

a charcoal sketch of his head. Micky bought the sketch and despatched it to Mary, who was greatly pleased with it. A clever draughtsman had caught the boy's fearless outlook on life. A stranger, looking at it, would have said : "What a jolly young fellow." The word "fellow" implies fellowship, comradeship. Beneath the sketch was inscribed : "*Un camérade*," and the signature : "Gaston Torin." None could call Michael Lynn handsome ; his features were too irregular ; he had his father's broad forehead and eyes ; from Mary he had taken a generous mouth and a firm chin ; the nose was short, sensitive of nostril, and tip-tilted. The girls told him that if he followed his nose, he would meet *le bon Dieu*, but, in more intimate talk, they admitted frankly that *le bon Dieu*, and even the blessed *Sainte Anne*, were lost to view. The faith of the province, crumbling before the War, had vanished, leaving in its place a curious fatalism, which seemed to affect even the children. To the smaller "*pardons*" the young people still went to have a good time, not to entreat a special grace. The old women deplored this. Micky passed them on their knees before the granite Calvaries. Now and again he talked with the village *curés*. They were hopeful that fervent faith would return redeemed by blood sacrifice. But what they said lacked confidence. Poor, beautiful France lay stricken, bereaved of her male children, all martyrs. Of the women these sad-eyed priests spoke rancorously. One old man cited an early Father of the Church who denied that women had souls. Their alluring bodies had been fashioned by the Prince of Evil. Micky remarked naively : "I wish, *Monsieur le curé*, you could meet my mother." Whereupon the old man embraced him on both cheeks. . . .

Micky remained a week at Huelgoat, the "comrade" of Torin, who endorsed emphatically what Arthur Wharton had said about Paris. He made it plain that it would be wasting time and money to study Natural History under professors who spoke rapidly in technical and idiomatic French. He commended what Micky was doing, picking up here and there a colloquial knowledge of the language. Paris would welcome him later on. The speaker had

escaped serious injury in the War ; and he was ten years older than Micky. He had been through the long-drawn-out agony of Verdun, and refused to talk about it. It was over. He spoke with enthusiasm of Art, holding Mr. Walter Sickert's view of painting : " Painting is a form of expression, like speaking, and a speaker who is incomprehensible cannot be said to be a speaker at all." This Frenchman made an impression upon Micky, because he was so comprehensible and practical. His illusions, if he ever had any, had been shell-shocked out of him. In his own graceful tongue he talked to Micky as Gilbert Norman talked to Primrose. Gilbert and he had nothing in common except a detestation of humbug and blinds drawn between fact and imagination. The twain ought to walk through life hand in hand, one the complement of the other, bed-fellows to the end. How faithfully imagination had served Madame Curie, for example ! Micky sucked in delightfully turned phrases, pleading for more. He was not aware of it, but this painter happened to be the first young man who imposed upon him a panoramic view of life and human endeavour. Micky grasped the fact that success—however you interpreted a will-o'-the-wisp of a word—exacted unflagging energies and concentration. You had to go " one better " than the other fellow, and between the novice and his goal countless other fellows were struggling to reach it. All this was solid stuff into which a boy could get his teeth—nourishing fare comparable to the roast beef of old England. But the Frenchman's views of life, apart from work, were not so wholesome. He had suffered cruelly ; suffering was abhorrent to him. The normal Englishman finds it difficult to understand the normal Frenchman, because the Gaul, being a Latin, is more of a dual personality. An Englishman of the well-to-do class works when he plays, and too often plays when he works. Between work and play in France a distinction is sharply defined ; they are different worlds. A Latin passes lightly and gaily from one to the other. At play, he *relaxes* ; he casts to the void principles that govern his conduct of business. Torin allowed nothing to interfere with his work. When he laid

aside palette and brushes he was ready for an "*apéritif*" and prolonged conversation. He preached the gospel of Béranger. One regretted, in old age, lost opportunities : *le temps perdu*. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may."

"Sweet Spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted lie."

That was the philosophy of Monsieur Torin—out of working hours. Michael perceived a *gourmet*, a taster and sipper, not a glutton. According to Torin a young man who didn't taste and sip was an imbecile. . . .

Micky parted from this wayfarer with regret. Torin hoped that they would meet again in Paris. He promised to introduce Micky to restaurants where "*le chair ne coute pas trop cher*."

## II

In Carhaix, our pilgrim rested and refreshed himself. Carhaix is within easy reach of the Black Mountains and the chapel of St. Herbot. In the *place* stands a statue of La Tour d'Auvergne, the intrepid Corret, by Marochetti. There was enough pipeclay in Micky's marrow to constrain him to lift his cap to La Tour d'Auvergne, a paladin of the eighteenth century. At Dinan he had paid the same obeisance to du Guesclin.

Fresh air, exercise, and good food had transmuted a boy into a man. He felt inebriated with health and freedom, particularly freedom. The world was his oyster. He was beginning to feel at home in this pleasant land of France.

In Carhaix he met Philomèle.

She was a dainty little thing, of gossamer texture, who could spin webs. *The Bretonnes bretonnantes*, working in the fields carrying eggs and vegetables to market, were not dainty. Micky respected hands coarsened by incessant labour, sturdy limbs, and rude simplicity. He was accustomed too to Rabelaisian *bardinage*. They could take care of themselves, arousing no protective instincts. Philomèle was different. Her grandmother kept a *faiencerie*, a pottery

shop. Micky wondered if it could keep her, because there appeared to be so few customers ; Philomèle sold him a bit of "*vieux Quimper*," a figure of *Sainte Anne*. Incidentally she talked knowledgably about pottery, something more than the mere patter of the trade ; incidentally also she talked better French than the peasants, testing Micky's command of vowels by making him repeat till he got them perfectly the three words : "*Fourrure, fourreur, fureur.*" The good grandmother, everlastingly knitting, nodded her head. "Yes, yes, my little Philo is clever, but clever—not like the others, fat cows, and dirty as cows. She is clean, sweet-smelling. Look at her hands. Hold out your hands, Philo." The girl held out her hands. Micky took them gently. They were soft, white, cared-for. . . . Instinctively he pressed them ; and the pressure was returned not coquettishly but in the friendliest fashion. *Gran'mère* continued : "Philo can teach you, Monsieur. And then, *une p'tite bénéfice, quoi?*" Her old eyes sparkled. Micky jumped, hot-foot, at Opportunity bolstered by importunity. *Gran'mère* insisted that it would be an act of charity. Obviously *Sainte Anne* had arranged the whole affair. . . . In less than five minutes it was settled that the lessons should take place in the kitchen behind the shop. Philo would instruct Monsieur in the formation of vowel sounds, open and shut. Reading and dictation would fill up agreeably a couple of hours. . . .

Philo's dark, velvety eyes were pools of liquid light whilst she listened to this talk. She promised to do her "possible." To clinch matters, *Gran'mère*, not forgetting that this nice boy had paid without haggling a top price for a figure of "*vieux Quimper*," said imperatively : "You are two children ; you will be as brother and sister ; embrace each other."

Without hesitation, Philomèle laughingly presented a cool cheek. It was so soft to the boy's lips that he saluted the other. *Gran'mère* chuckled. . . .

## III

*Gran'mère* may have been ignorant, but, by the Seven Saints, she was not innocent. Sainte Anne, we may conceive, after talking the matter over with Saint Michiel de la Mer del Peril, must have held *Gran'mère* mainly responsible for what happened. It is not straining conjecture to suppose, that *Gran'mère*, many months after Micky met Philomèle, may have tried to expiate sins of omission by making a pilgrimage *à pied* to a distant shrine, where, lifting heavy skirts, she fell upon bare knees, and then *on* her knees, over sharp flints, crawled painfully round a certain chapel set upon a hill. Torin's imaginative eye would have beheld her doing this penance and entreating forgiveness with tears raining down her wrinkled brown cheeks. . . .

Avarice and cruel necessity were together too much for the old woman.

For a week at least Philo and Michael met daily in the little kitchen behind the shop, where a *lit clos* (the cupboard bed of the province) faced the granite Breton hearth ; and these meetings might have been witnessed by all Carhaix. Micky paid cash on the nail for each lesson. Before the week was out Philo was in love with her pupil. Whether *Gran'mère* was aware of this cannot be determined. Had she been taxed by a neighbour with being an accomplice of the naughty little god, she might have retorted : "Business is business." Good money had come to her door when business was bad. For the rest, she may have salved a leathery conscience with the reflection that Sainte Anne would keep her eye on Philo. . . .

The girl was older than the boy, and if it be true, as some strong-minded ladies affirm, that the so-called weaker sex is infinitely the stronger and more intelligent in their intuitions and perceptions, why, then, despite the feminine insistence of "having it both ways," such ladies may hesitate before they throw stones at Micky. . . .

Philo prattled to him about herself, confirming what he had picked up here and there from other girls. She did not believe in the saints, or in legends and folk-lore. It was

absurd, for example, to take the *trépied* (iron tripod) out of hot ashes each night, in the primitive faith that spirits of the departed liked to sit on it when it was cool. That, look you, was farce, nothing else. And, if there was a *bon Dieu*, why had He permitted this hideous war? In halting French, Micky attempted to cope with a free-thinker, but invariably she laughed at him and courted attention by correcting his blunders, mingling the jam of kisses with the powder of verbal chastisement. She chided him seriously, honest in her wish to earn her fees; and her kisses were butterfly kisses. Never once, during that first week, did she kiss him, or offer her cheek. No; her kisses were dainty, typical of herself. When Micky mimicked her to her satisfaction, she would clap her hands, and kiss the tips of her fingers. Then this kiss would be blown to him across the table at which they worked, or, as a rare mark of approval, she would touch his brown cheeks with the tip of the kissed fingers, exclaiming: "You are a good child; I give you that to encourage you." Micky felt encouraged, these presents for a good boy were captivating and innocent. He respected his governess, because she respected herself. Being a modest boy, he told himself that in France kisses, *le bon bécot familial*, were the current coin of friendly intercourse; they *meant* nothing. He felt awfully sorry for Philo; she was such a bright little thing, so gay, so joyous, so easy to please; *Gran'mère*, knitting away in the *faïencerie*, with the door between it and the kitchen half open, would hear peals of laughter, which surely, surely, was as it should be. Business being so slack, and customers so few, she would now and again wander down the street, not too far, to exchange salted gossip with neighbours. She could see any customer approaching her small shop and hurry back in time to receive him. . . .

At the end of the first week, Micky became distressingly aware that Philo was occupying his thoughts—out of school-hours. He began that delightful and perilous pastime which takes the form of recreating a friend of the opposite sex, of remoulding her, re-draping her. Suppose that Philo had been the daughter of Sir George Royal?—At

the same moment Philo may have been thinking : “ If my *Angliche*, who decidedly is not a ‘ Goddam,’ had been the son of the butcher round the corner ?— ” This game has been played ever since the world began. It was started by Cupid when the imp was born.

Micky *knew* that he ought to pack his knapsack, a rather heavy ruck-sack, and take the high road again. His sense of direction urged him to fly west to Quimper without more ado. When he braced himself to mention this (lightly) to Philo, her tender bosom heaved. She said reproachfully : “ I am not teaching you anything ; I am such an imbecile ; you have wasted your money, *hein* ? ” He reassured her on that point. “ Then, why, *why* do you go ? You told me that you were free, free to do what you liked. If you like it in Carhaix, why do you talk of Quimper ? ”

She made him promise to stay a little longer ; it seemed churlish to refuse. As a reward she used for the first time, the intimate “ thou ” and “ thee.” “ *Enfin, je suis à toi, mon ange, tu m'aimes ! Comme je suis contente !* ”

Micky was too young to protect this young girl against herself. They happened to be alone. Nobody could enter the shop without tinkling a bell on the door. *Gran'mère* was off duty, down the street.

They kissed each other ardently. Monsieur Torin would have smiled. All that he had said about gathering of rosebuds had lingered in Micky’s memory. Outside the shop a July sun was blazing ; inside the kitchen, a *pot-au-feu* simmered on the *trépied*, giving out pungent, appetising odours. Suddenly, Philo’s mood changed ; she dissolved from laughter into tears. It was impossible, doubtless, to think of her pupil as the butcher’s son who made eyes at her, and would take her *en chemise*, dowerless, if she winked an eye at him. It may have occurred to her that she would *have* to take him, whether she liked him or not, there were so few men. *Gran'mère* expounded the comforting doctrine that love came after marriage together with the babies. Before marriage—*pouf-f-f* ! A penniless girl married, if she could, to secure a home, a shelter. And then, of course, she behaved herself. Before marriage, yes, a little licence

might be permitted, but discreetly, name of a pipe : *discreetly*.

Perhaps Philo's kisses were the more unrestrained because the son of the butcher *was* round the corner, brandishing his huge knife, a big, greasy lout, a "pincher," and a bit of a bully, red as the joints of beef which he carved so dishonestly, never giving fair weight, blustering with his poorer customers, servile to the rich. . . . To be in *his* arms——! What horror——!

She explained her tears after Micky had kissed them away. Her angel, who had fallen out of the blue, must go. Nothing else was possible in a commercial world. *He must go.* That was Destiny. God, if there was a God, would not permit partings between lovers who adored each other. There might be a Devil with a forked tail and an eternal grin. Philo could see *him*. They could not help loving each other, but they could not go on loving each other. He was on his holiday ; she had never had a holiday. The Devil saw to that ! No matter ! Life was life. He would return to England and marry, perhaps, a "Mees" with protruding teeth ; she would marry, too, and lose her teeth, one always went with every baby, and in five years, or less, her looks would be gone ; she would be as the others. The Devil would laugh at her, as he laughed at them. Good ! Granted ! One was not a fool ; one accepted life and made the best of it. Even the priests preached that. And it paid, yes, it paid to make *bonne mine au mauvais jeu*. All the same, the passing hour was theirs. Let them make the most of it ! She demanded one more week, seven happy days. *Et puis—Bonjour !*

Micky capitulated.

#### IV

He became himself after he had left Carhaix. To the last Philo played the game as she conceived it ought to be played, speeding him on his way—pathetically, smiling and waving her hands. She entreated him not to come back. The shrewdness, the fatalism and prevision of the

*Bretonne* were made manifest. *Gran'mère* had silenced gossip, but if he came back, all Carhaix would think ill of her.

He tried to be honest. What had happened was incidental and accidental, a bitter-sweet experience common to most young men. There had to be, sooner or later, a *first*. Paid love revolted him. He had dared to say as much to his mother. He felt that he could tell his mother what had happened, extenuating nothing. She would understand.

He hated to leave Philomèle, but she was right ; she knew her tiny world. At the last she had spoken with strange calmness :

“ I have had my beautiful days, my angel.”

“ Philo ; it is so ridiculous to call me your angel.”

“ Why ? You descended out of Heaven——”

“ My God ! ”

“ Almost, but *almost* I believe that the good God sent you. What have you given me ? A sweet memory. That is mine ; nothing can take that from me. And, look you, swear, swear to me, swear that you will not forget Philo, your little Philomèle.”

“ I wish I could change you into a nightingale.”

“ *Tiens* ! What do you mean ? ”

He recited the legend, as told by Ovid, keeping back harrowing details. The story caught her fancy.

“ Good ! If I were a nightingale, I could follow you to Quimper, and sing you to sleep.” She quoted Botrel, the people’s bard :

*J' entendis le rosignol de nuit  
Chanter le chant du Paradis.*

Micky was profoundly moved. She made it so difficult for him to go, for ever, out of her life. At a word, he might have lingered on. She wisely withheld that word. Was she thinking of herself or of him ? Who can tell ?

He promised not to forget her.

As he took the road, tramping doggedly west, he told himself that Torin would have congratulated a “ comrade ”

upon his good fortune. Torin also had no "use" for paid love. What was artistic in the man rebelled against prostitution, whether of mind or body. He spoke of his *bonnes fortunes* with the conviction that they had been "good" for him, good too for the others. That familiar French expression "the others" was illuminating coming from Torin and Philomèle. Apparently, they considered "the others" sympathised with them, understood them. Torin had spoken of "*une petite dame*," with whom he had passed a too brief honeymoon. His attitude towards her might have provoked cynical laughter from an Englishman. Torin had insisted that it was so fortunate for *her* finding her as he did, lonely, in financial distress, craving companionship and reasonable gaiety. To Micky, who still cherished boyish beliefs in knighthood and what knighthood imposed, Torin, as *preux chevalier*, seemed to have "done what he could." They too had parted unwillingly, each grateful to the other when the inevitable cross-roads came in sight. There had been to Micky, saturated though he was with Mary's teaching concerning the body as a temple, no taint of "beastliness" in Torin's story, no beastliness in him or her. The little lady and he had been fellow-travellers, comrades, for a joyous month.

In the same fashion, he and Philomèle had drifted together—and parted.

## V

By the time he reached Quimper, where letters awaited him, he had regained his high spirits. Thoughts of Philo were now suffused with gratitude. His initiation into love and passion might have been so disastrous to peace of mind. Philo had no regrets. When he saw her, the morning after the day when she had given herself to him, her attitude perplexed him. He came into the kitchen, where the table was spread for "*la dictée*," shame-faced and serious. To his amazement, she laughed out of court their misdemeanour, refusing to call it a sin. She expressed herself as contented, satisfied.

"Hold thy tongue, and kiss me."

He detected in her something maternal. He was her "baby," her "cabbage."

A long letter from Mary whirled him back to Frodsham-on-Rother. Having economised at roadside inns, he felt justified in "descending" at the Hôtel de l'Epée, where he secured a pleasant room facing the Odet.

"My own blessed son" (wrote Mary Lynn): "Your letters during the last three weeks have been shorter than usual, but I have tried to follow you on the map. Some day, you must take me to these pleasant places where you have lingered. I should love it. With you and Prim both away I have found Frodsham what I used to call it—the Land of Nod. Mitchie is in London. I fear that her mother is failing, but I can't get much out of her. I have an uncanny presentiment that she is yearning for pupils. And, if so, she must leave me. . . .

"Prim came back from Wharton Hall yesterday. You will hardly know the child when you see her—such a smart little person, with an 'air.' I gather that the Whartons have been sweet to her, perhaps too sweet. When people are too sweet to me I feel sticky, don't you? But that is my father peeping out in me; he hated fulsome notices of his best work, although he purred when work less good was praised. I return to Prim. I am not altogether happy about her. Arthur is ever so much better; she ought to be looking and feeling—radiant. Can the course of love run too smooth? I dare say I'm an old fool; I can't help worrying about Prim, simply because I made her mine. It is quite likely that she worries over Arthur. When he discards his crutches, she will stand more firmly on her pins. Then again, Wharton Hall is a bigger place than I had supposed. She may be dismayed at the size of it. Frankly I don't know. . . .

"Come back, Micky, when you feel tired of your vagabondage—and not before. I underline that, and I mean what I write. You have earned a long holiday; I can read between the lines of your letters that you are 'tasting' Brittany, smacking your lips over it. Your good time is my good time. It is such a blessed satisfaction to me that you

have now the health to enjoy life. By the way, a last word about Prim. Mitchie, in her abrupt fashion, warned me, before she went home, that I must expect a change in the child. She said : ‘ She is not your child ; expect much of Micky, expect little of Prim—and you won’t be disappointed—’

“ Your old Mum sends you many kisses and all herself.”

“ What a topper she is,” thought Micky, as he thrust the letter into his pocket, and opened an envelope addressed by Prim. What Mary had written about Prim in no way distressed him. From a child he had known that Prim, however loving and demonstrative she might be to so kind and considerate a guardian, had never regarded “ Mum ” as a mother. On the other hand he believed firmly that Prim regarded him as a brother—and a confidant. He thought swiftly (and cleverly) : “ I’ll bet Prim has been bored a bit ; I’ll bet she had to cross her ‘ t’s ’ with these swells. But I’d like to smack her well for not looking radiant before Mum. It’s a rummy thing that Mum hasn’t dropped on to the truth. Prim is lonesome without Arthur ; she wants him. That hits me bang in the eye.”

He read Prim’s letter. Thanks to Mitchie she could write a good letter. Part of the schoolroom *curriculum* had been the writing of letters, in the spirit of the immortal Mr. Toots, to imaginary persons. Notes had been penned to Royalties and Celebrities. At this game—for the children considered it a game—Prim had “ romped home”—a winner, easily outstripping Micky.

“ DARLING BOYTIE,

“ I am at home again, and I miss you horribly. Yesterday, I had a brain-wave. Why shouldn’t I join you ? Why not ? Why not ? I have still a little money to burn. Why should boys always do the jolly things ? I hate myself for being a girl. I’d like to pop on boy’s clothes, do a bunk, and turn up—grinning. If you didn’t want me, I’d buzz off on my own. Now, darling, think this over and wangle it from your end. Really I’m mad crazy to see you and

talk to you. Mick, I can't talk to anybody as I talk to you. You jolly well know that. And we have such *heaps* to talk about—my visits to Aunt Felicia and Phyllis and Wharton Hall. Arthur is very busy up there. He would *like* me to join you.

"Why did you stop so long at Carhaix? Did you meet another Gaston Torin? Have you fallen in love with a French girl? Not you. You're in love with life. Oh! I do wish I were a man. It must be heavenly to feel absolutely free, to be oneself, to call no man—master——"

"Lordy! I have just read what I have written. You mustn't think for one minute, not a second, that my poor darling Arthur is—Master. He's just the opposite. Funny, too, because the General is masterful through and through—He Who Must Be Obeyed! It vexes me a teeny-weeny bit that Arthur limps about carrying out his orders. But, there it is; he's built that way. I believe he would obey my orders, if I dared to issue orders. Can you see me doing it——?" "Tension! Right about turn! Quick mar-r-rch—to Brittany, to Timbuctoo, to the Never Never Land! To anywhere out of England."

"Yours to a crisp,  
"PRIM."

Micky whistled when he read and re-read this lively epistle. Prim had the knack of writing as she talked; he could hear the tones of her voice, see her gestures, smell the fragrance of her. Mum was right, as usual. What cheek his presuming to think that she might be wrong. All was not well with Prim. Everything that had distressed him when she first spoke of her engagement by the two-acre pond came back to him, and with it the faint whiff of carbolic. Could he have loved Philo, if she limped? Young men, after their first love affair, think that the devious by-ways of love are an open road. For that reason Monsieur Torin would have emphasised the supreme importance of a right initiation, free from what Micky termed beastliness. Micky could think about love as it ought to be, a rushing together of man and maid, a common give and take, a common

ecstasy, an obliteration of self, a mad desire to share pleasure with the beloved object, to make her happy, to satisfy HER. He had been through that. But, back of his mind, far, far back, curiously colourless, was his vision of that little girl growing up for him, slowly ripening, his future wife. Had he met her in East Sussex, would he have rushed at her, would she have rushed at him ? He could see himself stepping towards her, as a man steps into a hot bath—gingerly ; he could see himself perfectly sane, not mad at all, nibbling at love, not gobbling it—— !

“ Poor little Prim ! ” he exclaimed. “ I must do something. What can I do ? ”

On the impulse of the moment, he dashed off two letters, believing that he had solved the problem. Mum was “ fed up ” with the Land of Nod ; Prim longed to get out of England. Let the two join him at Quimper. Then, all three together, they would find a quiet place by the sea, some haven of rest which might have inspired the famous line of de Musset :

“ *Où la mer vient mourir sur une plage endormie.*”

## VI

Next day Micky stared at that lace-like dream in stone, the cathedral. Once more, such miracles made him yearn to be an architect. Who was the patron saint of architects ? Torin had said that architecture was a road to Fame’s temple, if, mark you, one had original talent and indefatigable patience. In his own graceful way he had drawn a parallel between the lover of Nature and the artist who wrought in stone. The builders of the great fanes of France had sought and found inspiration from Nature. What was stone fan-vaulting, but the attempt to copy soaring interlacing boughs of trees, particularly the beech. And if a man could pursue some rare bird or butterfly, *eh bien !* he had the artist’s blood in his veins, the artist’s sense of beauty in his mind and soul. The man who pursued money was lost, *perdu en mer*,

because, even if he appreciated beauty, he put a price on it. The Christ had been sold for thirty pieces of silver.

The patron of the hotel, in answer to many questions, told Micky that Beg Meil, where the famous American painter of "marines" had worked, was within easy distance and not likely to be crowded with trippers immediately after the War. Concarneau smelt disagreeably of sardines. Later on, next year, hotel-keepers might expect to do a roaring trade. Meanwhile he was of opinion that both English and French holiday-makers would be too busy at home to travel far afield. Comfortable accommodation could be found anywhere—

Two days passed before the boy received a telegram :  
" Prim and I will join you at once. Letter follows."

## CHAPTER XII

### MICKY PLUS PRIM

#### I

MISS CHEVERTON looked "radiant" when she reached Quimper ; and Mary, taking her son aside at the first opportunity, said emphatically :

"The child is herself again."

This provoked discussion, the sort of talk dear to Mitchie. If you lost yourself temporarily, how did you find yourself ? A moment for confession, but Mary looked so serene, so rejuvenated at meeting her boy in new and pleasant surroundings, that Micky hated to disturb her peace. Mary loathed sin but loved repentant sinners. Was he repentant ? He couldn't answer this question to his satisfaction. It was easier to talk about Prim. What his mother would say about Prim and Arthur might help him to adjust his relationship with Philo. . . .

Mary exercised habitual common sense.

"We are all upset, my son, because action is over and reaction has set in. Take yourself, take me, put aside Prim for a moment. I thought that you would come back from France and be perfectly happy at home. You weren't ; you felt restless ; and Arthur pointed out the necessity of urging you to obey your own urge. I realised how wise he was when I was left alone. I too got horribly restless, rather a new experience for me. I couldn't pick up the threads of life where I had left them in 1914. Now, let us consider Prim. Arthur and she rushed into this engagement. I have never quite understood how it came about. The only fact that concerns us is that it did come about ; and, by the luck of things, she has got the right man, a good fellow, one of the best. That means much to me. She is so impulsive

that she might have hurled herself into the arms of the wrong man."

"Mum—why do girls hurl themselves into the arms of the wrong man?"

Mary smiled, not altogether maternally.

"Are we to discuss the doctrine of Original Sin? That is a peg on which to hang dogma. Unhappily, I can't answer you out of the fulness of personal experience. Till I met your father I never wanted to hurl myself into the arms of any man. But I am not Prim; my temperament is entirely different. Till I met your father, Mitchie would describe me as epicene."

"Epicene——?"

"Neuter, an 'It' in petticoats. We have always been outspoken with each other, and it would be absurd to pretend that as a young girl I was unconscious of my sex, but it took a back seat. My mind, such as it was, controlled my body. That may have been an inheritance from my father. Up to the last his mind reigned supreme over his body. . . . We are wandering from Prim. . . . When I took Prim I knew that she was all girl, just as you were, and are, all boy. Nothing epicene about either of you. But my father maintained most amusingly that a perfect human being ought to be hermaphrodite. He meant, of course, that a man should have a feminine side to him and *vice-versa*. And never forget, Micky, that he exercised an enormous influence on me. If I was 'It' during his lifetime, he is partly responsible, because he imposed masculine ideas upon me. Mitchie was enormously interested in his views. We both agreed that little Prim, being so typically feminine, and that you, a boy through and through, might each learn from the other; and I think that you have. You made a tomboy out of her; she made you considerate and less selfish. Still, it is extremely difficult for me to stand in her shoes, but I have made the attempt. . . ." Mary paused, half-frowning; she continued gently: "Prim is conscious of her sex; most girls are; they read books forbidden to Victorians; they talk freely with young men, which we never did; they discuss everything. That may be good or bad for the individual—

poison to many who have no sense of the ‘values’ of life. Then they obey instincts—and nothing else. I see Prim obeying her instincts, which are not my instincts. She hated the discipline of the hospital, and no wonder ; she talked with V.A.D.’s who had lost four years of fun, their blooming time. I can understand that she was crazy for excitement—any excitement. It must have been tremendous excitement falling in love with a hero.”

“ Simply thrilling.”

“ Humanly speaking her love for him saved his life.”

“ Another thrill——”

“ Yes ; but afterwards—— ! We can imagine that at home she wearied a little of playing nurse. Arthur went away ; she dashed up to London ; she met her aunt, her cousins, and their friends. She had, for the first time in her life, money to spend on clothes, and time to spend in amusing herself. She spoke to me of some of the men she met as ‘ rotten.’ I dislike the adjective, but I was pleased to think that she used it. Comparing ‘ rotters ’ with Arthur must have made her blink a bit. From London she travelled to Wharton Hall. She has described to me Wharton Hall, the General, and Aunt Priscilla. I gather that the General is a most agreeable man when he has his own way. The Iron Duke said that of his elder brother, Lord Wellesley, to Frith, the painter.”

“ What a memory you have, Mum.”

“ I wish, sometimes, that I could forget some of the lumber in it. . . . Prim seems to have passed some rather dull hours at Wharton Hall. I am sure that she was frightened at what Dizzy called ‘ splendid isolation ’ ; she said to me, which amused me, that in the Dukeries, dukes and duchesses had to behave like children at Sunday School. She exaggerates, but I can guess what she meant. According to her Arthur was ‘ sweet.’ She says he is a great gentleman——”

“ He is. Good old Arthur—— ! ”

“ Yes ; but we come back to her, a girl not yet eighteen, with an education broken off. . . . Mitchie and I lost our grip of her when she went to Brighton ; we shall never

recover it now. You see, my son, in attempting to read Prim, we have to take so much into account——”

“ You’re a blessed marvel at that.”

“ But—it’s guesswork. Well, she came back to Frodsham, where there were no excitements. Nobody is entertaining. We are putting our houses in order. Her wedding won’t take place this year. . . . She moped. . . . So did I. . . . Perhaps we both felt that you were having too good a time. . . . We were longing to share your traffics and excursions. . . . And—here we are ! ”

## II

Prim looked radiant, but Micky was conscious of a change in her. All his life he had accepted her sisterly demonstrations of affection as a matter of course, but he missed them when they were withheld. After all, he reflected, being engaged to Arthur—and alertly aware that a magnificent ring proclaimed this to an inquisitive world—she had to be circumspect.

In her enjoyment of his company, her relish for “ fun,” she was the same old thing, a “ *oner* ” to make the most of the flying hour. They planned together a dozen expeditions.

The talk with Mary about Prim had one immediate effect. Mary had said that as a young girl her mind had controlled her body. Good ! Mary’s son must learn to control *his* body, *his* mind. Prim could achieve blankness of mind ; she could sit still and think of nothing. Since her visit to Chelsea, she had acquired a sort of patter when she talked—as she liked to do—upon “ beyondy ” matters. She affirmed that when she had achieved blankness of mind, the subliminal self was actively at work. To this Micky replied : “ Give that tosh a miss.” Whereupon Prim rebuked him and railed at him. Psychic matters were not “ tosh ” ; fools sneered and mocked at everything they were too lazy to understand or try to understand. Phyllis, certainly not a fool, believed in the subliminal mind as a potent force ; Phyllis had met men of recognised standing in the scientific

world who were delving deep into their subconscious zones.

Micky was amused. Prim's confidences, her ingenuous talk about herself, flattered not his vanity—he was singularly devoid of that—but his adolescence. She accepted him as a man. Dared he tell her about Philo?

The Fates, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, decreed that he should. He had taken Prim to see the wonderful staircase at Kerfeunteun upon a perfect day. Mary remained in her room, writing letters. By this time Micky was considering Architecture, rather than Natural History, as his life's work. Both Mary and Prim were delighted. New Papua, New Guinea, the Upper Waters of the Amazon might allure, but Prim beheld an intrepid traveller "in the pot," boiled alive to make a feast for cannibals. She and Mary agreed that the boy must be beguiled from paths which might lead to such an unnatural end—! They dissembled successfully, encouraging fan-vaulting ambitions. They would prefer, so they said, to wander inland, to see the ossuaries and shrines of Brittany, and thence, if time permitted, to visit Rouen, Bayeux, and Chartres. Micky, quoting Monsieur Torin, cited Chartres Cathedral as the "wonder" of France.

At Kerfeunteun, sitting in the shade, he told Prim that Torin had promised to help him when he went to Paris; he admitted that Torin had made him think of becoming an architect, although Torin despised the modern domestic architecture of France. A novice might, if he had aptitudes, acquire enough *technique* to gain admittance to the *Académie des Beaux Arts*. Prim listened attentively. She could now understand why a tramp had lingered in Huelgoat. She repeated the question asked in her letter:

"Why did you stay so long at Carhaix?"

Micky blushed.

"I believe you met a girl there."

He sighed.

"You did. Tell me all about her."

Her tone was insistent. If he wished to save an awkward situation, he would have to lie, and Prim probably would

know that he was lying. He wanted to tell somebody, to get a load off his chest. More, he wanted to tell a woman, fearing the coarse laughter of men.

“ I—I did.”

“ Micky, if you don’t tell me everything, I shall hate you. If you do tell me everything, I shall love you. At the station, two days ago, I knew that something had happened. When you were at Carhaix I had one of my dreams——”

“ Oh ! Your dreams—— !”

“ But some of my dreams come true. And it isn’t as if I had one dream. . . . Nearly always I have two dreams, perhaps on successive nights. . . . Yes ; I had a vivid dream that you were drowning, and that I was looking on unable to help you. You were entangled in weeds, struggling desperately. And close to me, within easy reach, lay a long pole. I had only to bend down, pick it up, and hold it out —to you. But I couldn’t move. That was the awful part of the dream. In my second dream, the very next night, Mum was with me. She couldn’t move either——”

“ Did I drown before your eyes ? ”

“ As you were sinking, I woke up trembling with misery——”

“ You told Mum ? ”

“ No ; I can’t talk to Mum as I talk to you, never could, but I was miserable. I really believed that we should hear that you were drowned. When you wrote that you had left Carhaix, I felt happier, and now we are sitting together alone, and you tell me that something did happen at Carhaix. What ? ”

He told his story very badly, but there was no self-pity discernible. Glancing shamefacedly at Prim, he was unable to interpret the expression upon her face. She said nothing till he had finished. Her first remark startled him.

“ It is something like the story of Rosie Bunday.”

He had forgotten poor Rosie Bunday, but Winky’s quip flew from his lips.

*Rosiebundi.*

*Rosa Mundi !*

“ Prim ! It’s not the least bit like that awful tragedy.

But you are a girl ; I oughtn't to have told you ; I'm sorry I told you. Yes ; you think me a beast, a filthy seducer of innocence."

" No, I don't ; she wasn't innocent. Who is, nowadays ? Who is ? "

" Why do you speak in such a hard voice ? You asked me to tell you ; and—and I *wanted* to tell you before you asked me."

" Why ? "

Mitchie's curt " Why."

" I—I don't know ; yes—I do. . . . I suppose, if I'm to tell the absolute truth, that I wanted you or Mum to know the worst and—and forgive me. I w-wanted, I daresay, to c-cocker myself up with some sort of assurance from you that the affair wasn't too beastly."

" Don't tell Mum."

" Damn it all ! If I can tell you, I can tell her."

" It would spoil her holiday. You can't know what you are to Mum."

" Of course I can."

" You can't ; no boy could. Mum lives for you ; you are part of her, and she thinks you the best part. You have no idea how this would hurt her. I say so, because it doesn't hurt me. Mum's mind is the cleanest in the world. Mine isn't."

" My God, Prim, what are you saying ? "

She smiled faintly.

" Don't worry. I have no story to tell—yet. Doesn't it make it easier for you, when I say that you and I can talk this over, because our minds are not like Mum's ? Give me your hand."

She held it tenderly.

" I do love you for telling me. I could tell you if anything went wrong with me ; you are the very first person I should tell."

" Surely—Arthur."

" Gracious ! For a moment I had forgotten Arthur. I—I don't know ; it might be difficult to tell Arthur some things. He looks on me rather as Mum looks on you ; it

makes me uncomfy when I think about it, but I don't think about it—much. Micky, was it very awful saying good-bye to her ? I can see you both howling——”

“ You'd better consult an oculist. There was no howling. *Gran'mère* was there ; so we just grinned at each other.”

“ M'm. I hate that old woman. She wanted your money. Yes ; I lay all the blame on her. Poor Micky ! And poor Philo ! She'll marry the butcher's son.”

“ I'm afraid she will.”

They sat silent. Prim spoke first :

“ You feel that it's over and done with ? ”

“ What else could I feel ? I promised not to go back, not to write.”

“ Are you longing for her now ? ”

“ No—yes—no. My mind must control my body. It has to. . . . A man is a fool to long for what he can't get.”

“ Anyway, it is over and done with. You—you didn't drown. My dream was only half true.”

“ Prim, dear, Mum wrote that she was not too happy about you. Did your dream make you unhappy ? ”

“ Wretchedly.”

“ It wasn't anything else ? ”

“ No.”

She snapped the “ no ” at him. He looked relieved. Prim had not failed him ; she was a most understanding little person. In her heart she must have felt sick, but she had stood by. The dominant impulse in his mind at the moment was to justify her sister love for him :

“ I've sworn a tremendous swear,” he said, after a pause.

“ Oh, dear ! Is that wise ? ”

“ Not the swear you think. My oath must be kept. I—I swore by my father's memory that I would concentrate on work. As he did. I owe that to him and Mum. I mean to work like a black when I start in. Torin is sound about that. He may be a bit of a loose fish, but work is his religion. He says that the all-important thing is to find the right work. That flicked me on the raw, because, being an Englishman, I wanted to have it both ways. I wanted to travel and see the world. I am keen as mustard about

Natural History, but I'll own up to you that I kidded myself that it was in me to become a naturalist because I wanted to travel. Disgustingly selfish ! It meant years spent away from Mum and you. And talking to Torin I kidded myself that I was after beauty, whereas really I should have hunted rarities. I believe that I can hunt beauty as old Sir George hunted foxes and hares. Torin calls himself a *chasseur*. He could make pots of money painting portraits, but he chivvies colour, form, the ripples and curves of water, all the elusive things to be found in woods and streams. He says that they evade him, slip through his fingers, and that makes him keener than ever. I wish you could meet Torin ; no ; I don't : he might make love to you. There are two Torins."

" Monsieur Torin would respect—this."

She held up the finger upon which blazed her engagement ring.

" Not he."

" What ? "

" He doesn't respect a bull because he has a ring through his nose. I say, Prim, let's take off our stockings and paddle in the stream down there. I want to cool off, don't you ? "

Laughing, hand in hand, they sped down a grassy slope and paddled.

### III

Love inspires love ; confidence begets confidence. The joyous pair, it may be suggested, were as yet hardly aware of all that Mary and Mitchie had done for them. Micky, for instance, was still in ignorance that Frodsham—and what is included—had been to his mother a Land of Nod. He loved Frodsham, he loved the woods, the downs, the hop-gardens, the ponds and streams of East Sussex ; he knew every man, woman, and child in the village ; he was on the friendliest terms with neighbouring farmers. As a boy, when he rushed into the schoolroom, bringing with him a strong smell of stables, Mitchie would say protestingly : " Do you prefer the smell of the midden to rose-

water?" he would reply cheerfully: "Yes, I do—why shouldn't I?" On such occasions, to the delight of Prim, he would use the broad dialect, drawling out his vowels, mimicking Naomi. He was of the teeming Sussex soil—and proud of it! And Primrose, almost up to the moment when she qualified as a V.A.D., shared the boy's love of the countryside. Both Mitchie and Mary kept from the children what they hardly dared to discuss with each other, their love of London, the lure of roaring thoroughfares, the crowds, the lights, the sense of movement instead of stagnation. . . . Both children believed that "Mum" loved Frodsham and her picturesque, ramshackle old manor house. The fact that she had bought it was evidence, confirmation strong as Holy Writ, that she *wanted* to buy it. . . .

Naturally enough, they accepted too (as a matter of course) all that was done for them, blissfully unaware of vigils, long talks late at night, when two women sat up to talk interminably about them, united in the determination to leave nothing to chance, to do all that was possible for their right upbringing and development. . . . As a reward for this never-failing care and solicitude, the children had "responded": a delicate little bud had bloomed into a rose; the boy's strength had outgrown his weakness. Physically the pair were sound to the core, a brace of pippins; they had absorbed too, with limitations, the standards imposed, but we shall arrive at a truer conception of the individual characters of Miss Mitchell's pupils if we accept her considered judgment on them. It was obvious to such an enlightened lady that Michael Lynn, thanks to his judicious selection of his parents, had expanded into what he was from within, whereas Primrose Cheverton had become what she appeared to be under the gentle pressure of influences from without. She had been far more amenable to suggestion and discipline than the boy. But now—on the threshold of manhood and womanhood—each would go different ways. The boy would go his way relying upon himself; the girl would go her way relying on others. Both Mary and Mitchie agreed that if Primrose relied upon Arthur Wharton it would be well with her. . . .

Confession to Prim and plenary absolution had lifted a weight oppressive to a sensitive conscience. By common consent the incident was dropped. Prim spoke the final words, after they had cooled off, before they returned to "Mum":

"If it's over, it's over. It might have been beastly, Mick; and I suppose that Mum would think it beastly anyway, so as you have got it off your chest, don't thump it down on hers. Phyllis says that all young men travel your road—and ever so many girls; Phyllis is not a humbug; and she takes people as she finds them, even if they're living in sin. It's a big puzzler to me, you know, to—to *reconcile*—ah-ha! that's the right word!—two—two *conflicting*—got it again in one!—specimens of women—Phyllis and Aunt Priscilla, or Phyllis and Mum. But there it is. What bothers me so much is that when I'm with Phyllis I can see things and people as she does; and when I'm with Mum I want desperately to be like Mum and to think as she does. Phyllis is not a rotter; I loathe rotters. I simply couldn't stick some of her friends. Lordy! how jolly it is to be with you again. Mick, if I tell you something, will you promise not to laugh at me?"

"Honest Injun!"

"I'm going to marry Arthur; and I must—I *must* make a burnt sacrifice of all my sinful desires."

"Silly ass! You haven't got any."

"Silly ass yourself, if you think that. Of course, you judge by appearances, and that's why we take such care of appearances, we women...."

"We women——! You're a kid—a flapper."

"Am I? Then you're a baby, back in your pram. I—I feel, and I am, years older than you."

She spoke so indignantly that he laughed.

"All right, Mummie. Spank the baby good and hard."

"I may have a baby of my own to spank before we know where we are. If you take this as a joke, I shall shut up."

Beholding her on the edge of tears, he pleaded for forgiveness, readily accorded. She went on very seriously:

"I can't marry Arthur unless I make up my mind to

share his life, to be a real helpmeet to him, not a silly, pleasure-seeking hindrance. I'm beginning to know Arthur. I believe that if it hadn't been for the General, he might have gone into the Church——”

“ Kamerad ! ”

“ I felt as you do when that glimmered on my feeble intelligence.”

“ If it's true your intelligence is not feeble.”

“ Thanks. He became a Guardsman because he thought it was his duty, and the Wharton sense of duty is, well, built on rock. My sense of duty is built on shifting sands. That's not mine—Mitchie's. I rather scored off her when I asked if the shifting sands were in her hour-glass. Arthur fills me with holy awe. He looks young, but he isn't. I believe that some of our swells, who don't appear in the picture papers, are born old. There's a cradle at Wharton, old oak. It stands in the hall beside an old oak Bible box, with a date on it, 1542. Near the cradle is an ‘ exercising ’ chair, early eighteenth century. Whartons sat on that and jogged up and down for an hour or two, when they couldn't hunt. Arthur lay in that cradle ; Arthur read the old Family Bible ; Arthur jogged up and down in that old chair when he was a boy ; and I say, but not to him, that it must have affected him. He was brought up in an old house, with old pictures, old plate, old servants—and he was an only child. I say that all his instincts are protective. All his life he has known that he needn't toil and moil to increase what will be his some day ; it has been jolly well rubbed into him that his duty is to keep what he's got. That must knock ambition out of any young man. You're mad keen to get something ; I don't say money ; you want to make a mark, to get—to get, yes, I'm Mitchie's painstaking pupil—*recognition*. But Arthur, bless him ! has got that. At this moment he's racking his brains in the effort to carry on along pre-War lines. He says that landowners are going to be hit hard, cruelly impoverished. He hasn't time to think much about himself, and what he thinks about me scares me.”

“ Why—— ? ”

" He sees me as his better half and, don't laugh, his *star* ! I'm a moth. I flutter about his lamp ; I'm tremendously attracted by his light, which burns so steadily. That is why I repeat that I must make a burnt sacrifice of my sinful desires."

" Name 'em."

He was as serious as she, sensible that this confidence was a pathetic appeal to his manhood, a draft upon it that must be honoured. But, back of his mind, lay the comforting conviction that Prim loved Arthur. If she hadn't loved him, would she have made the first advances ? From a young man's point of view, no young girl could throw herself at a man, unless she loved him. . . .

" I want fun, the fun I have had with you— ——"

" But that isn't sinful— ——"

" Wait. Fun with me means excitements—thrills. I like adventures—and misadventures. I'm a rotten golfer, as you know, but the rubs of the green don't irritate me ; I can keep my temper at tennis. Don't you wish you could say that ? "

" Yes ; I do. Somehow, Prim, it exasperates me when I play below my form, when I'm licked by a fellow who plays even worse than I do. I don't mind the licking, but I loathe my own feebleness."

" Perhaps I'm accustomed to my own feebleness. Where was I ? Yes—the rubs of the green. I don't mind getting soaked to the skin when I'm out with you ; I've been dog-tired tagging about after you, when I carried your cartridges. Even in the hospital, on my knees scrubbing floors, I felt that I was doing something. To sit still and do nothing—help ! Then, in my chase of fun, I'm fleshly. I hate the word, but I can't think of any other. I'm much greedier than you. Enough is not as good as a feast—to me. I want the feast, a good 'tuck-in.' Mitchie has warned me against wanting anything—*inordinately*. My desires are sinful because they are inordinate. Phyllis and I planned a life in London. That *was* fun, if you like. Arthur can't live in London, not for years. If I coaxed him—Gosh ! what a temptation ! I believe I *could* coax him—to take a

house in London, and to give me a free hand with it, he would be at a loose end ; I should make him ‘ untrue ’ to himself. He would de-de-degenerate from a Wharton into a Cheverton. What a falling off was there, O Hamlet—— ! Have you got it ? Has it soaked in ? I must keep step with Arthur ; he can’t keep step with me.”

Micky couldn’t cope with this outpouring. Had he doubted Prim’s love for Arthur, he would have said : “ It just comes to this : is marriage with Arthur Wharton good enough for you ? If it isn’t, say so. Together we’ll face the music, the yapping of all and sundry. Tell Mum ; she’ll help to unpick the stitches.” . He dared not say that, believing, as he did, that Prim loved Arthur with the right sort of love. He had reached the conclusion after wakeful nights, that his love for Philo had no enduring qualities. He had stopped “ aching ” for her ; he was uncomfortably aware that in his case love, if you had the cheek to call it that, stopped short of personal sacrifice. He wouldn’t have given up his “ career ” for Philo, cut loose from family ties, thrown his cap over the windmill. Obviously, little Prim was prepared for sacrifices. . . .

“ It has soaked in,” he replied dully. “ I—I don’t know what to say. Your sinful desires don’t seem to be very sinful. Old Arthur is an uplifter, if you keep step with him, you’ll march on and up. With a different fellow you might move faster but down—down to the depths. I—I was in the depths when I left Carhaix. To-day,” he drew a deep breath, “ here with you and Mum I feel that I’m climbing up, and it’s reinvigorating, breezy, right as rain. We’ll make our bonfire together, Prim. We’ll chuck into the flames our fleshly desires and watch ‘em fizz. I do thank God that I have Mum and you.”

He spoke humbly, but with the hope and enthusiasm of youth picking itself up after a fall. They gazed at each other.

“ Micky—— ”

“ Yes ? ”

“ Am I more to you than Philo was ? ”

“ Prim—— ? ”

"Answer me truly."

"Now you are making me feel a beast, forcing me to look at my fleshly desires, to weigh them against you and the happy years we have spent together. I didn't have the pluck to do that, Prim. It's the acid test. You *are* older and cleverer than I am. You are more to me than twenty Philos. I can call my love for her by its right name, when you look at me as you do now."

They returned to Quimper.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MOUNT BY THE SEA

#### I

THE three pilgrims wandered to St. Pol de Leon, and thence through the Trégorrois country to Mont Saint-Michel. A further extension of the pilgrimage, to Caen, Bayeux and Chartres had to be postponed.

Torin had urged Micky to visit Mont Saint-Michel, and to visit it under the guidance of Viollet-le-Duc. With the inspired work of Monsieur Viollet-le-Duc in his hand, *in both hands*, a student of Architecture might, with the assistance of the great archangel, get an inkling—he mustn’t expect more—of the aims, the art, and the patient skill of the eleventh and twelfth century builders. It was impossible, so Torin maintained, to appreciate the delicacy and science of the builders in later centuries till you had assimilated the informing work of the pioneers. From the Norman, if you had intelligence enough to grasp what had been achieved, you could soar to the tip of the sixteenth century *flèche* of the cathedral at Chartres, and understand the Transition Period, and all the glories and embellishments of later Gothic.

Before Micky came in sight of the wonderful Mount, crowned by his own Saint, he had made up his mind to be an architect, building his ambitions upon the granite of Brittany, not an insecure foundation. Granite is refractory stone, as all masons know, and throughout the province granite had been wrought into forms of surpassing loveliness. There are bits of stonework in countless tiny chapels, in ossuaries and calvaries which leave even the ordinary tourist agape with admiration and astonishment. Micky was not an ordinary tourist and not an ordinary boy. He

possessed one salient advantage over boys educated at schools : he had never suffered from the cant and lies of pedagogues, who sincerely believe that they are free from cant and incapable of deliberate lying ; only the very few, who make a profession of teaching, can take the public-school system and view it with detachment. Public school men are intensely loyal to what has stood the supreme test of Time, to what has " turned out " Englishmen of whom England is so justly proud, a system, moreover, that compares favourably with other systems in other countries. Cant and lies are accretions, the defects of great qualities. Lies humorously underlie many of our tags and axioms ; cant conceals itself in canticles. It is cant, parrot-cry cant, to affirm that either culture or conduct can be standardised ; it is a lie when age tells youth that wisdom is the attribute of age, that youth necessarily must be foolish. The masters at the great public schools are to-day carefully chosen. As a rule they are public-school men. Inevitably, they see the forest in all its glory ; they haven't time, generally speaking, to study the individual trees. When Micky came into contact with schoolboys of his own age, he was astounded and confounded at their arrogant pride in their own ignorance of subjects which they deemed negligible, such as Natural History, Geography, Science, and Art. He could look up to them admiringly when they talked with authority about games. It was a grief to him that he didn't shine at games, as they did. Because he felt acutely his disabilities, he couldn't understand why they, in their turn, were not aware of their disabilities. When he spoke of this to Mitchie, she murmured : " *Troglodytes.*" Looking this word up (at her request) in the dictionary, he found that it meant " *Cave-dwellers.*" Mitchie pointed out that ignorance dwelt in caves. Nearly all these boys, sons of country gentlemen, were so " *cocksure* " of themselves and their " *people*." What *they* did and thought was " *right*." Apparently the last word had been said by the " *old governor* " or by " *My mother* " upon politics, religion, manners, and human nature. Unhappily, Micky had heard his mother and Mitchie discussing their neighbours in a critical spirit,

never unkind, but devastatingly iconoclastic. Both women laughed over ignorance, accepting it as the primal curse. Mitchie, in her dealings with her pupils, was never intolerant of bad taste in them. Trashy music, trashy books, "chocolate-box" pictures must be taken, as physic, by the young. With increasing knowledge youth purged its mind of rubbish. "Read that," she would say, "if you want to, but I hope you have intelligence enough to say to yourself afterwards: 'Never more,' as the wise raven did. Both Prim and Micky had acquired from this remarkable woman what is seldom learned at Eton and Harrow: Humility. When Prim found Beethoven too classic for her taste, Mitchie said: "That is not the fault of Beethoven, but your misfortune."

Micky had never been crushed by elder brothers. He had never experienced the sense of "defeat" which to many small boys is so overwhelming and disastrous, so inimical to sustained endeavour. He had been taught to believe that he could do "anything," if he gave his mind to it, and both Mary and Mitchie treated his mind with respect, making it plain that the mind was capable of immeasurable expansion—and contraction. . . .

He came to the Mount, overlooking land and sea, in the right spirit; he insisted upon climbing it alone, alone with Monsieur Viollet-le-Duc. . . .

He stood on the platform of the West Front. He could look down, some two hundred and fifty feet, but he was intent on looking up. Part of the Abbey Church had been built in 1058, before the Conquest. Incredible! Presently he would examine piers that were nearly one thousand years old! Guide-book information, but what an appeal to the imaginative faculties!

Torin was right. Here, in monumental stone, lay enshrined energy, intensity of purpose, and endurance. Behold beauty that *was* a joy for ever. . . .

He spent half an hour in the refectory, where princes of the church had entertained the chivalry of France. Kings, paladins, conquerors, statesmen, fair women and brave men had sat at meat in this noble hall. What had

they eaten ? What had they talked about ? What had they worn ? Thanks to Mitchie, Froissart and Monstrelet, he was able to get a glimpse, not much more, of the remote past, to link up that past with the present, to see with one eye a peacock on a lordly dish, and with the other one of Madame Poulard's spitted chickens or her famous omelette. . . .

He lingered long in the "Merveille."

This was planned by the Abbot Jordan at the end of the twelfth century. In the Hall of the Knights, Michael Lynn dubbed himself Knight of Saint Michael—and Saint George. He knew enough to recognise this superb *salle* as Early Gothic. When he passed into the "Merveille," he understood from Monsieur Viollet-le-Duc that he had left the twelfth century behind, he was blinking at the thirteenth, as well he might. Finally, dazed and bewildered, breathless with excitement, he sat down in the Cloisters to sort and adjust his thoughts. . . .

It was all—great, stupendous, romance in stone, war in stone, love in stone. It was prose and poetry exquisitely fused, artist and artisan had laboured together to a common end, and that end had been incomparably achieved. . . .

Gazing across the Channel, his thoughts flew to Bodiam Castle. It was a fearsome reflection that once he had reckoned jackdaws' eggs to be the thrilling feature of Bodiam. Later on, it is true, thanks again to Mitchie, he had attempted to reconstruct a ruin. He had now come back to his first immature love of stone. Even then, long ago, he had understood what stones quarried, shaped, and placed together, symbolised—the triumph of endurance. Even then, when clambering about the massive towers, he had said to himself : "How did they do it ?" Mitchie explained how they did it, the labour involved, the pertinacity, the interminable hauling, the sweating spade-work. An impatient boy, eager for "results," had rebelled, exclaiming : "I should have hated the digging and hauling," to which Mitchie replied trenchantly : "Top marks for the pupil who does well what he dislikes to do."

When the boy descended from the "Merveille" to Madame Poulard's hotel, where an agreeable smell of roast

chicken distracted his thoughts from the twelfth century, Prim, slightly "peeved" because Micky had ascended the Mount alone, greeted him derisively :

" What did Moses find up there ? "

" Flapper ! Flippant flapper ! "

Thus rebuked, flippancy fled.

" Micky, you might tell me your first impressions."

Sir Michael Lynn said solemnly :

" I believe that Saint Michael himself planned everything. It's all, every bit of it heavenly."

Older men have said the same.

## II

Having made up his mind definitely that he wished to be an architect, Micky ached to begin his apprenticeship. Primrose pleaded for a few days at Dinard.

" You want to peacock about in your new frocks," said Micky, whose presentable garments were at home.

" Yes ; I do. You look like a tramp. I am paying you the compliment of your life, when I tell you that I don't much mind being seen at Dinard with you. Perhaps you can buy a reach-me-down suit of flannels. We shall bathe, and lie on the sands, and talk about your future."

Primrose had her way. At Dinard, where gossip bubbles like a chalybeate spring, Miss Cheverton found herself acclaimed as the future Mrs. Arthur Wharton. However, not being a fool or a snob, and having acquired from Mitchie what she termed "mental poise," flattery failed to turn her head. It is amazing, if we come to think about it, that the normal education of youth in England doesn't defeat its own ends. Teachers and taught travel round a vicious circle of misconceptions and nearly everything else to which the prefix "mis" is applicable. The young ladies whom Prim met at Dinard, many of them "educated" at expensive schools, regarded marriage as spectacular. It was important to secure a "send off": publicity pictures in the *Prattler*, a crowd, and "The Voice that breathed o'er

Eden" played by a famous organist! All these young ladies were aggressively commonplace, chatterboxes severely critical of any who might differ from them. Micky spoke of them as "know-it-alls." The post-war pose of attempting to look and talk like young men had begun to be noticeable. A few attempted to talk like old men, cynically, rancorously, and petulantly. These, it might be observed, were no longer in the first bloom of youth. Not even Mary could blame them for adding bloom; she complained that not enough paint was used: some war-worn cheeks required three coats at least. . . .

Dinard was not pre-war Dinard. Tradesmen and hotel-keepers demanded exorbitant prices. Dinard has always been "*plus Briton que Breton*," but it has never been dull. Both Micky and Primrose enjoyed themselves mightily. Mary watched them with complacent eyes cleared of shadows. . . .

### III

In Dinard, Micky made the acquaintance of Theodore Frobisher-Bedloe, a sometime Oxford Don, who had left Oxford in 1915, taking with him what used to be called the "Oxford manner" and the "Oxford accent," which naughty Prim mimicked to the life. F.B.—as Micky called him (not to his face)—said "dinnah" and "rea-ahllly," having apparently no use for the final "r." He had volunteered for active service in 1915, but was unable to pass the Medical Board; he then offered his services to Reuters, and as he spoke Italian fluently, he was despatched by them to Italy, where he remained, on and off, till peace was in sight. He told Mary that he had settled down in London as a freelance journalist. Mary recognised the Purist and Man of Letters. F.B. introduced himself to Mrs. Lynn, being in the same hotel, as an admirer of her father's critical work. He had read and remembered Mary's biography of Graves. It was difficult to say how old he was: he might have been anything between thirty-five and fifty. Micky disliked him at first, because he had the languid air of the very superior

person purged of all youthful enthusiasms. But Micky, after a word or two with his mother, hurled aside first impressions and was immensely "bucked" (so Prim said) when F.B. took kindly and sincere interest in him. F.B. could talk discriminately about Gothic architecture, Viollet-le-Duc was not an empty name to him ; he had the history of France at his tongue's tip. What was he doing in Dinard ? When Mary put this question to him, he answered with faint derision : "I came here because I made certain that I should not meet anybody whom I knew ; I bathe, I read, I play golf." He might have added : "And I watch the others——!" He watched the others with amused toleration, a looker-on at the game of killing time. It would be difficult to find two men more radically different than Torin and Frobisher-Bedloe, but they had this in common—an appreciation of Micky. To F.B. Micky was the young man educated by two women at home. He wondered what sort of a job they had made of it. F.B. was labelled Eton and Christchurch ; he had been a scholar at both these reformatories, using the word without any offence meant. He was aware that he had been reformed at college and at "The House," that he was saturated with the best traditions of both. Scholarship was in his blood. As a scholar, a "tug," he had not been too happy at Eton ; and yet "Floreat Etona" was inscribed upon his heart. At the first glance at Micky, he may have thought : "An unlicked cub !" Five minutes' talk with the boy disabused his mind of that. Later on he said to Mary : "I lift my hat to you. Your young Michael justifies the care and attention you must have bestowed on him."

F.B., probably because he was an Englishman, exercised more influence than Torin over Michael Lynn. It is possible that he read Mary's mind, divined her secret wish to keep her son within measurable distance. She had admitted to him that the plans laid down by Mitchie and herself had gone agley : both children had left home at least a year sooner than had been anticipated. But it is more likely that F.B. exercised his own sound judgment quite independently of Mary's wishes. What he did—and

nobody else had a hand in it—was to urge upon an apprentice to the oldest of the arts the claims of London.

"Why go to Paris?" he asked.

Micky was taken aback. Arthur Wharton had spoken of Paris as a place where Natural History might be profitably studied by a young man who, for reasons best known to himself, desired to pursue butterflies and birds in the French Colonies. After changing his plans, Paris had remained a fixed idea.

"Viollet-le-Duc was head of the Beaux Arts," he mumbled.

"Was. I'm not crabbing Paris, but the houses and villas all over France make me sick. On the other hand, in England—where there is going to be a big demand for small houses—the national taste is steadily improving. You don't think that you will be set to work to design cathedrals and palaces, do you?"

Micky grinned, and shook his head.

"You have to learn a trade; you have to practise five-finger exercises till you acquire some sort of *technique*. I happen to know two or three men in London, who might take you on. Probably your mother would have to fork out a hundred a year, as premium, for three or four years. By that time you will know where you are."

F.B. spoke slowly, as was his habit, and impressively. He expected "squirmings," but both Mitchie and Torin had emphasised the necessity of five-finger exercises.

"I know; I've got to work like a black. You've been most awfully decent to me, Professor Bedloe."

"Drop the Professor. I left that useless handle in Oxford. Affinity has been established between you and me."

"Sir——!"

"Drop the 'sir.'"

F.B. might have been put to it to explain what he meant by *affinity*. He was true to his type, incapable of meanness, petty jealousy, snobbishness or pretension. Eton and Oxford had indeed "re-formed" him, remodelled him, making him negative rather than positive (even when he lectured), critical and hypercritical. More, he was distrust-

ful of types like himself. Micky reminded him of himself before he had been licked into his present shape. It was a disconcerting thought that he might have been like Micky, if he hadn't gone to Eton. To his fastidious mind what he regarded as "unlicked" in Micky had to be balanced against the boy's individuality. A minted sovereign, if it could think, might recall the time when it was what miners call "free gold." The glad sense of freedom and independence oozing out of every pore in Micky's body astounded Theodore Frobisher-Bedloe. He saw Micky as one young man in a hundred, whereas he felt himself to be a composite photograph of the other ninety-nine. Having been an instructor of youth, F.B. was dismally conscious of how little of any real value he *had* taught. Pre-war Oxonians listened politely, perfunctorily, generally with well-bred indifference, to what he had to say. What had he said? Was it worth saying to the mutable many who were thinking of the playing fields and the river? A few, very few—and damn it! not the most attractive of his pupils—had sucked in his teaching and become replicas of himself! Talking with Micky F.B. became certain of what he knew to be a fact: he had never directed his education; he had been directed by it. And to-day, after this welter of bloodshed, who was he? What was he? A man of small independent means, who, "fed up" with academic distinctions and clogging fetters, was practically beginning life again as a half-hearted publicist, grinding out "stuff" which he sold to editors who were "out" not to educate the public, but to increase the circulation of their papers!

*Impersonality versus personality.*

"Extremes meet," he said gravely. "That, Michael, is a *cliché* which would provoke a contemptuous smile in Oxford. We despise *cliché*, and *cliché* has a strangle-hold on us. Yes; you and I meet, perhaps never to meet again."

"Oh! I—I hope not."

Micky grabbed F.B.'s arm, squeezed it affectionately, and looked unhappy. Such demonstrations were rare in F.B.'s experience—and not unpleasant.

"If you study in London, we shall meet again."

"Good old London!"

"It is newer than you think. Nevertheless and notwithstanding—"

He embarked cautiously upon a dissertation on London as a training-school for a youthful Robert de Torigny. Long before he finished Micky, obeying his sense of direction, had veered due north from due south. When F.B. finished, the boy said cheerfully :

"I shall work in London. *You* know; I don't. Mum will be bucked. Thanks most awfully. It is a long, long way to Tipperary, but I've sworn a terrible swear to get there."

"Stout fellow!" murmured F.B.

#### IV

Mum *was* bucked. The brooding dove settled upon a mind weary of war—and preened its wings. Perhaps for the first time since Mrs. Lynn had assumed the responsibility of adopting a child, she felt easy in her mind about that child. It was fatuous as yet to accept Micky's sense of direction as the right direction; Time and the boy himself would determine that. F.B. had said deprecatingly: "He means to get to Tipperary, a town in a troubled country; he may be off to Kalamazoo in six months' time. What matters is: that he will work like a black to get 'somewhere.' Again, I congratulate you and Miss Mitchell, whose acquaintance I hope to make. A great experiment has justified itself in his case. Had you sent him to a public-school and an university, he might have scattered his energies. How you did it, is a matter of surmise, but the boy can concentrate on an objective. He is not, happily, distracted by the claims of games and sport; he is not being directed, as I was. Meanwhile, he will be reasonably near you."

"I have to thank you for that, Mr. Bedloe."

"Not at all. He would not swerve from his definite course to please me, or even to please you."

Mary nodded, "tickled pink," as the children would have

said. She made up her mind that she would sell her old manor and return to London, to keep house for Micky. Old friends and new friends would rally round. She would attempt, whole-heartedly, to establish the right "atmosphere" for her son. *She had a glimpse of a grandson!* Could she, dared she, set about finding a wife for Micky? What an exciting quest! Somewhere Micky's wife was growing up——! Mary sighed, thinking of the young ladies in one-piece bathing costumes who, at that moment, were displaying their charms before appreciative Frenchmen. It was a source of intense satisfaction to her that the boy was apparently not allured by them.

The "know-it-alls!"

What did youth know? Why did age forget its own youth? Because age was naturally indolent, reactionary asking little of itself, asking too much of youth. . . .

Within another day or two, it was settled—approved unanimously—that Bayeux and Chartres could be visited next year. Sunshine and sea-water had brought a warmer damask to the cheeks of Primrose. They would linger for another week in Dinard, and then return home.

On the eve of departure, Prim received a disquieting letter from Aunt Priscilla, the more disquieting because she implored her dear little niece not to be alarmed. Arthur, as might be expected, in his haste to get well quick, had suffered a "set-back." The injury (one among many) to the *pelvis*—Aunt Priscilla underlined that part of Arthur's anatomy, obviously wishing to convey to a young girl that it was not mentioned ordinarily in conversation—was not yielding quite as it should to treatment. Arthur, in fine, was in bed, but not—not in pain. D.V., he would be up and about in less than a week——

By the same post came a letter from Arthur, almost making fun of a temporary indisposition.

Primrose wilted.

She wanted to cross from Saint Malo to Southampton by the next boat, to take her place by Arthur's bedside. This was accepted by Mary as one more proof of true love. But no such extra proof was needed. Both she and Micky were

agreed that Prim "adored" her lover, although Wharton Hall might be a thought too "grandiose" for her simple tastes. Mary pointed out that Wharton Hall didn't belong to Arthur. General and Miss Wharton might not be "prepared" to receive her.

"I—I don't care ; I must go to him, I must."

"Why ?" asked Micky.

"I've had a dream about him. Before these letters came, I knew. I didn't tell you. Mum thinks me an idiot about my dreams—so do you."

"No," said Mary gently. "That is not quite fair, Prim. Some of your dreams have puzzled me, but, as I couldn't explain them to my own satisfaction, I preferred not to talk about them to you. I want to talk now. What did you dream ?"

Prim hesitated.

"I have dreams and dreams, two sorts. There is the dream that affects myself ; there is the dream that affects others. The dream that just affects myself, that seems to—to cast a shadow before, to—to warn me that trouble is ahead of me is always the same, always. In that dream I seem to be standing outside myself, as if I had left my body. Then I see myself at a railway station. I have lost my ticket and my luggage. . . . I am all tied up in knots, in a sort of beastly spider's web. You can laugh at me, but when that happens something goes wrong soon afterwards——"

"And the other sort of dream——?"

"That always varies. I see other persons, ever so clearly, in the same trouble that happens to me. They are always struggling too, and I am looking on wanting to help but paralysed, unable to lift a finger——"

Mary remained silent, Micky, on the fence between belief and disbelief, slipped his arm round Prim's waist. She continued in a different tone :

"This trouble with his pelvis is his worst trouble ; he told me so. It is the trouble that we thought would kill him."

"But it didn't," said Micky.

"That big specialist in London, Sir Somebody Some-

thing, wouldn't commit himself. Arthur had to tell me that. He told Arthur it might be his weak spot for the rest of his life. I'm sure Arthur wants me."

" You shall go to him," said Mary decisively.

## v

They crossed the Channel next day. Primrose found Arthur in bed; and he remained there till he died. Everything that could be done was done. At the end opiates eased the pain he had to endure, but they could not alleviate the suffering of a young girl who refused passionately to leave her lover. Mary was sent for, aghast at the change in such a light-hearted creature, who looked a wraith of her former self. Up to the last Primrose seemed to believe that her love would save him, as it had saved him before. But, when it was over, when she was alone with Mary, she sobbed out :

" I didn't love him hard enough ; I—I failed him."

Sanity attempted to cope with what appeared to be insanity although for some hours at least Mary's reason almost tottered on its throne. The inordinate demand upon her sympathy and compassion was met and honoured by a supreme effort of will. The General collapsed. He hated the next heir, a fellow, curse him ! who waxed his moustache, who would sell the old place, and squander Wharton money upon half the harlots in London. Miss Wharton wept herself into nothingness. England held many such stricken households, but in few—so Mary hoped—was there such cumulation of bludgeonings, such bitter woe and disappointment. Arthur had almost got well ; now he lay dead, with an unearthly beauty upon his face. . . .

" I believe he wanted to go," wailed Primrose. " He was ten million times too good for me. Perhaps he saw me as I am—and that killed him."

Micky came to the funeral. It was a bitter moment for him (and Mary) when she told him that Prim refused to see him—

"Not see—*ME*," he gasped.

"My son, the hand of God lies heavily upon our poor little Prim. I have persuaded her to go to bed."

"But that makes no difference!—I *must* see her."

"Not—not against her wish."

"Mum, you don't know what we are to each other. She told me, not two months ago, that if she was in any trouble that she would come to me first. Oh! what have I said? Does that hurt *you*?"

"Dear Micky, I know what you feel. For the moment we can do nothing except pray, pray with all the strength that is in us that this distracted creature may become again, not what she was—that is impossible—but what God surely intends her to be, a noble woman, for never again will she be a child, the child who romped about with you——"

"I—I can't bear it," he sobbed. "There isn't a God—I say, there isn't. I wish—I wish I'd been killed in the War."

Mary sat still—praying. The boy fell on his knees in a passion of self-reproach and hid his face on her lap.

"I didn't mean that, Mum, I have you. I'm such a beast. But Prim—such a l-lamb, such a k-kitten. Oh Hell——!"

"Micky, we have to pass through Hell—all of us. I passed through it when your father died. And ever since that bitter hour I have known that God does chasten those whom he loves, hard though it may be to believe it."

"Well, I can't believe in anything; I'm down and out."

## VI

The coffin was placed upon a farm-wagon, drawn by four splendid Percherons, and conveyed across the park to the churchyard close to the Dower House. The General walked erect at the tailboard, dry-eyed—the last of the Whartons. Over the grave, a detachment of Guardsmen fired a salute. Bugles sounded the Last Post. . . .

The General leaned heavily upon Mary's arm, when he

returned to his empty house. Curtly, he thanked her and asked her to come to his room. . . .

Arthur had left all he possessed to Primrose. Protest rose to Mary's lips, but the veteran held up a trembling hand.

"I am glad that he has done so. I wish, with all my heart, that I could leave her what isn't mine to leave, what must go to a wastrel. He had about fifteen hundred a year of his own. It is hers. And this house is hers, whenever she cares to come to it. Will you, please, go to my sister. You will tell Primrose what I have just told you, when you see fit."

Mary hesitated. The old man had nerved himself for a terrific ordeal—not yet over. The "county" was awaiting him in the big drawing-room; outside the house all his tenants were assembled. He drew himself up.

"I must meet my friends, Mrs. Lynn. It is good to have friends at such a time."

## VII

The sowing was over. The blooming-time had come and gone. What of the harvest?

Mary returned to Frodsham with Primrose. Micky returned to London immediately after the funeral. It was arranged that he should stay with Felicia Norman till his mother sent for him. Then Primrose and he would meet. Being unable to explain Primrose to herself, how could she explain her to Micky? She did her best—

"Leave her alone with me till the effects of shock have worn off. She is dazed, as well she may be. I am counting on Mitchie, who has been such an influence in her life. You and I can do nothing—nothing."

"I wrote her a long, long letter; she hasn't answered it."

"She will. Give her time."

"Mum, letters are no good. You kiss her for me, as I want to kiss her. Tell her she's my own sister, mine till the crack o' doom. Tell her that I can think of nothing except her and all our jolly days together. Tell her, ram it into her, that we shall be happy together again. . . ."



BOOK III  
THE HARVEST

There, if I grow, the harvest is your own.  
*Macbeth*, I. 4.



## CHAPTER XIV

### A CONFESSION

#### I

SIX years later, Mary was sitting with Primrose in the panelled parlour of the old manor house. Many things had happened. Mary refused to believe that anything *happened* in a world governed by design. As she grew older she attempted to find what underlay the haps and chances of life in the same indefatigable spirit with which she had delved into old letters and papers seeking Graves, the authentic Graves, as he revealed himself.

When Micky met Primrose, he was unable to measure the change in her. She had become ten years older in less than a month. They met with constraint. Micky was horribly sore because, deliberately, she had kept him at a distance. He couldn't understand it, except on one hypothesis, a pill to swallow : she didn't regard him as a brother ; she had lost a lover, and with him had gone the power of loving. Mary had to admit that this might be true. Constraint vanished, although Primrose refused to talk about Arthur or about herself. She wanted to talk about Micky and his affairs, and was still so capable of taking a sisterly interest in them that Micky felt rather ashamed of himself. Of the change in her fortunes, she had to speak. Under the terms of Arthur's will, she could spend her income before she came of age. The capital, in gilt-edged investments, would be hers unprovisionally when she was twenty-one. Mary, Micky, and Primrose formed a committee of three to discuss Ways and Means. Ways are easy when means are ample. They entreated Mary to keep Frodsham Old Manor—and Mitchie. Mary yielded to importunity,

because both her children insisted that she must have her heart's desire—a small house in London. That was to be Prim's affair ; she could well afford to pay for it—all the bills—on the proviso that Mary "ran" it.

Mary assented because she perceived that choosing a London house, decorating and furnishing it, would distract Prim's attention from herself. Ultimately it did. But Primrose wished to remain in the country for many months. That, so Mary reflected, might be instinctive, the instinct of the wounded animal ; anyway it was a wish that had to be respected. From the moment when the girl began to inhale again the strong south-west wind blowing across the downs, she mended apace physically. . . .

Micky, meanwhile, thanks to F.B., was at work under the banner of that original genius, Sir Claud Font, R.A., who—according to F.B.—would tell Micky swiftly and unmistakably whether or not he had "aptitudes." Font had not asked about aptitudes. When F.B. said to him primly : "By the way, Font, I know a boy who is eager to work under you," Font replied : "Oh, damn that boy ! I know your boys, mannikins all of 'em !" Then, seeing an old friend wince, he said : "Who is he ? Has he—guts ?" F.B. winced again. Next day he presented Micky to Font, who stared fixedly at Micky's ingenuous countenance, exclaiming (as if Micky was not present) : "A head—a well-proportioned head ! Is there anything in it ?"

Micky blushed.

"Tell me, my boy," continued Font, "why you wish to be an architect ?"

"Because my name is Michael, sir."

"Michael, eh ? If it had been Inigo——" he chuckled. "What has Michael to do with our cursed housing problem ?"

"Saint Michael built the abbey at Mont Saint-Michel."

"Why didn't that occur to me ? Where were you educated ?"

"At home——"

"Private tutors——?"

"One mother, one governess."

Font laughed. He began to hum a tune, to fill his pipe, still staring whimsically at Micky. From that moment he called him Michael. Matters were arranged on a business basis. Michael was made free of the office. At the end of six weeks, he would be accepted or rejected. If accepted, his mother would have to pay a thumping premium covering an apprenticeship of three, possibly four, years. He *was* accepted. Mary signed a cheque joyfully.

Meanwhile, for six months Primrose remained at Frodsham with Mary and Mitchie.

The chastening Hand had been laid heavily upon poor Mitchie. Her mother was dead ; her father was unable to support himself ; her savings—the savings of twenty years—were gone ! To extract this information from a proud and reserved woman exercised Mary's tact and sympathy. Mitchie loved her work. Teaching had become to this quiet, middle-aged woman a passion. Miss Mitchell had never undervalued her gifts as a teacher ; and she held them to be gifts. What had been given to others.

" You are offering me—charity," said Mitchie.

" You know that isn't true."

" M'm ! Perhaps I do. I may be able to help. I—I will do what I can for a few months longer."

## II

The months glided by swiftly. What Mitchie had predicted came to pass. Micky had been troublesome as a boy, in and out of mischief, refusing to obey orders where his health was at stake, a rebel against petticoat government, but turning his face to the light, looking on and up, as his father had done. From the minute after his articles were signed, he set himself doggedly to master the *technique* of his art, which he refused to regard as a craft. From the first too Font recognised in the boy not aptitudes but the genius for taking infinite pains, which is not genius, but without which genius is of no account. Micky, in a word, caused Mary no anxiety when he cut loose

from her apron strings. With Primrose it was otherwise. . . .

For two years at least, after Arthur Wharton's death, Primrose was a thorn in Mary Lynn's flesh. The familiar metaphor is good and bad, bad because a thorn can be extracted, good because a thorn, if it escapes extraction, can be a source of intense irritation. When Mary said, almost despairingly, to Mitchie : "I seem to have no influence at all over the unhappy darling," Miss Mitchell replied grimly : "She is exercising a surprising influence over *you*." This cryptic remark had to be explained, but Mitchie linked herself with Mary : "We were too pleased with ourselves and our pupils, wallowing in a fool's paradise. In my opinion the old may or may not educate the young, but unquestionably the young educate the old. Primrose is teaching us patience, fortitude, and forbearance ; she is rubbing in the hardest lesson in life to learn : the incalculable difference between human beings."

Primrose, so long as she wore mourning, may be compared to a jelly-fish thrown up by the sea. She was "sweet" to both Mitchie and Mary, but, in their eyes, sweet resignation was a disability. Mitchie put no sugar into her tea or her talk. Vitality had gone out of Primrose. When would it come back ? In East Sussex pity flowed over her in full spate. Everybody was "most awfully sorry" for her. Mothers of marriageable sons (not too many left of them) regarded her with yearning eyes. Sir George Royal, furious with his son, "my Admiral," because he remained a bachelor, said to Mary bluffly : "You wouldn't marry me, but our children might make a match of it, what ?" Mary replied, with a disarming smile : "That, George, is their affair, not ours." To her amusement "my Admiral" inspected Prim with a weather-beaten eye which twinkled, approving trim "lines" and a fancy figure-head. If he loved, which is most doubtful, he rode away on a stout cob ludicrously like himself. In due time there were others who would have married Niobe, had that lady enjoyed an income of £2500. . . .

Mary, with all her excellent qualities, was not a match-maker. It would have occurred to any ordinary matron that

a match might be brought about between Prim and Micky. That did occur to her when the pair were little more than babies. But she knew that Micky loved Prim as a sister ; and as time passed Prim had crept into her heart as a daughter. Hints from the indiscreet provoked mild indignation. She hoped that Prim would find, or be found by, another Arthur. . . .

In London, as had been expected, Primrose came out of what Mitchie termed her "trance." She had to bestir herself, to act upon her own initiative. Micky and she took a flat in Kensington and furnished it delightfully. Phyllis, much to her annoyance, was hardly consulted. Primrose shrank from intercourse with young, exuberant Chelsea. One or two "thrusters" of both sexes impetrated loans, promising immediate return of the money. Primrose lost these loans and these self-styled "pals." She was incapable of being "pally" with them. On the other hand, partly under the influence of Mary, partly also because income was so largely in excess of expenditure, she subscribed generously to Mary's pet charities, Maternity Homes, Orphanages—and the like.

### III

In the Spring of 1926 Prim and Mary were in high spirits because Micky had greatly distinguished himself. Against fierce competition, his design for a public building of importance had been accepted ; the fly in his ointment was big as a bumble bee to Prim. It had been hinted that Font had helped a favourite pupil. This was a lie, but couldn't be nailed to the mast as such. Font had never seen Micky's plans ; he had refused to look at them. Micky worked for him, at a generous salary, from ten to five. Outside working hours, Micky worked for himself. It was now humanly certain that he would have to give undivided attention to his own work. Font said : "Paddle your own canoe."

Mary was now able to tell herself that her son's future was assured. But what of Primrose ? It was generally

accepted by Aunt Felicia, Font, F.B., and Micky that Primrose had "got over" her deplorable "trouble." Mitchie said that she had crawled from under it.

Alone with Prim at Frodsham, for Mitchie remained in London in command of the flat, Mary made up her mind that she must explode—let herself burst. Prim was her daughter; Prim loved her. Love must find a way to break down barriers of silence. All that was dynamic in Mary revolted against what was static in Primrose, that *vis inertiae* so baffling, so irritating, so inexplicable. Nothing but dynamite would blow Prim's unnatural reserves into the middle of next week.

"In the name of the Sphinx, Prim, is there anything *you* want to do? You are a Sphinx to me. You seem to like drifting, but where are you drifting? For six years I've suppressed my feelings out of consideration for yours, but patience may degenerate into a vice."

"Mum, you are excited."

"I am and I refuse to be calm. I cannot deal with you as I can deal with Micky; I never could. But if you were my own child, you couldn't be dearer to me than you are."

"You darling! I know that."

I demand a truthful answer; it is my right. Are you playing fair?"

"I hope I always play fair with you. I—I can't make up my mind about things. At the moment I have a raging headache."

"You poor child! Lie down. I'll stroke your head."

"There's a better dodge than that. I really believe you could take it away, if—if you tried."

"What do you mean?"

Primrose explained hesitatingly. Again and again some friend of hers a much older woman, had exercised hypnotic powers. Mary frowned, but Prim reassured her. She had never allowed anybody else to do it; she admitted that she was afraid of such experiments, that she had been warned by her friend that hypnosis, as a curative agent, should not be induced except by thoroughly responsible persons. She ended simply:

"There must be consent. I'm sure you could do it. Try. Take my hand ; will me to go into the trance. Then, if I go, just will away my headache. It's so easy. I go off at once."

After some coaxing Mary consented to try, not quite believing that she could exercise such a power, partly curious, partly eager to take away a bad headache if she could. There was no difficulty whatever. Prim seemed to give herself up at once. Her eyes closed. . . .

Concentrating upon such a sensitive subject Mary willed that the headache should pass. She held both Prim's hands lightly in her own. Without any intention of filching intimate confidence, the insistent question in her own mind framed itself : "What is wrong with you, child ?" To her immense surprise Prim answered it immediately in a natural voice :

"I love Micky. I have always loved Micky. I shall love him till I die."

Mary dropped the hands within her own in sheer dismay. She believed for the moment that Prim had come out of her trance ; she laid a trembling hand upon the girl's shoulder ; there was no response ; she shook her.

She didn't wake up.

Mary's wits deserted her for a minute or two. Then she grasped again Prim's hands lying limp upon the girl's lap, and willed that she should open her eyes and recover consciousness. Prim opened her eyes, smiled faintly, and said gaily :

"What did I tell you ? The headache is gone. Isn't it wonderful ?"

"Yes."

"How odd you look, Mum. Of course this is an eye-opener for you."

"It is indeed."

"It's so heavenly to be free from pain. Did I go off easily ?"

"Quite."

"You see I gave myself up—absolutely. Now, you can charm away my headaches whenever you try. Splendid !

" But, Mum, has this upset you ? "

" Yes. I didn't believe that I could do it."

" You must know that you have a much stronger will than mine."

" This room is very stuffy. Sit still. I'll open a window."

Prim jumped up.

" I feel perfectly well."

Mary rushed to the window to hide her agitation. She dared not repeat what Prim had told her ; she felt, for the first time in her long life, miserably guilty of a sort of mental theft. With her back to Prim, she heard her voice :

" I must write some bothering letters."

#### IV

If Prim loved Micky—which accounted adequately for everything—could Micky learn to love Prim ?

That question assailed Mary for the next twenty-four hours. She could think of nothing else. Pity and love for the child—she was more than ever her " child " to Mary—filled a large heart. She attempted to " reconstruct " Prim. A thousand forgotten trifles came back, and with them what Mitchie had said so long ago : her suggestion—it was nothing more—that from the very first Prim had refused to regard Micky as a brother. Accept that as a rock-bottom fact, and Prim then reconstructed herself, justified herself, assumed new and startling proportions. A grievance rigorously suppressed for nearly twenty years disintegrated. Mary resented always, but *always*, Prim's persistent refusal to confide in her as the one person in all the world to whom the child *ought* to turn, as a flower turns to the sun. There had been from the first that unbridgeable gulf between them. Prim had taken her little troubles to Micky. It was absurd to say that Micky's mother was jealous of Micky, yet the fact rankled : *he came first*.

But—Arthur ?

Mary had talked to many women and innumerable girls,

ever since that distant afternoon when she had travelled from Southampton to Waterloo with a "sister under the skin." She had to call upon her experience with others, those "others" so different in characters from herself, such slaves to their impulses and emotions. If she herself had loved Lynn, and known that her love was unreturned, could she have flung herself into the arms of another man? Never! But thousands could and did. The weaker sisters did so—almost invariably. They had admitted as much to Mary, almost defiantly : "I—I wanted love." That had been the cry, the excuse, almost the justification of conduct indefensible from Mary's point of view. Young girls, hardly able to understand new and strange desires, wanted, *had to have* love. If they couldn't get it from Tom, they demanded it from Dick or Harry. In mean streets, Harry and Dick were just round the corner, ready to "click," ready to "take on" even "damaged goods——!"

She didn't know that Prim had flung herself into Arthur's arms, but she had guessed, after meeting Arthur, that something of the sort must have happened. . . .

Poor, unhappy child!

Once more, if it could be established as certain that Prim had engaged herself to Arthur in a moment of irresistible impulse, not loving him as he deserved to be loved, everything that had followed became natural instead of unnatural. Prim had made the perilous experiment, and it had failed. At the supreme moment, when Arthur lay dead, she had betrayed herself : "I didn't love him hard enough." Why had she refused to see Micky, grinding his lacerated soul to powder? Inexplicable at the time; clear as crystal now. And in Brittany——? How happy the pair had been together! How unhappy the child had been at Frodsham!

What complicated matters, tangled enough already, was the biggest fact of all. Mary had extorted the truth from Prim's lips; and Prim had no idea that she had told the

truth. To a woman like Mary, with a strict code of honour, the truth seemed to have been filched.

For a week nothing happened ; at the end of it Micky rushed down to spend Saturday and Sunday in the country. After many ponderings Mary decided that the Finger of Providence indicated a way. It wasn't her way. She had come to the conclusion that Major Lynn's son would choose his wife without assistance from his mother ; her sense of humour, not so strong as Mitchie's, was titillated when she beheld young women "making up" to a young man, who, like his father before him, seemed to be proof against feminine assault. But Micky was now twenty-six, and Mary had long passed the sunny side of fifty. The longing to hold a grandchild in her arms had become an ache. . . .

She decided to drop a hint to Micky that Prim was not his sister, and that he might do worse than consider Prim as a possible wife. Beyond that she dared not go. Once more, for the third time in her life, she was carried away by a tidal wave of sympathy for the child she had taken to her bosom. . . .

Believing in a world governed by design, it appeared to be more than mere coincidence that Micky's first great success should immediately precede this overwhelming discovery of Prim's secret. Micky was now in a position to marry an undowered girl if he loved her. Prim's fortune, whatever ill-natured gossip might say afterwards, was not taken into consideration, but it would be fatuous to ignore it. It might, as Mary knew, be regarded by Micky as an obstacle. He had refused to accept a penny more than was necessary from his mother ; he hated to be under obligations to anybody. . . .

A discreet hint at the right moment might transmute brotherly love into a warmer sentiment. . . .

Micky appeared, bursting with youthful pride in his achievement. It meant so much, far more than he could

reckon ; he had "arrived." Font said so ; F.B. said so. The long years of apprenticeship were over—Was Mum bucked?—did she feel in her bones that her son was a "winner?"

Mary, inwardly quaking, outwardly calm, allowed the fountain to play. The splash of it tinkled ; the sun of her boy's future seemed to shine through the spray, lending it iridescence. Had it not been for Prim, she would have called herself the happiest woman in the world.

"You *are* bucked," he declared, hugging her ; "and Prim will be bucked. Cheers and laughter!"

"Micky——?"

"Yes, blessedest?"

"You say this means—everything?"

"Well, doesn't it?"

"What do you call—everything?"

Something in the tone of her voice may have challenged him. He might have been back in the old schoolroom, facing Mitchie, when he attempted to answer.

"You know. I shall hang up my sign. Font thinks that he can find me a working partner, a fellow who can design gardens. Or, there is this : jolly well worth consideration. Font knows, and so do I, half a dozen firms who are a bit mouldy, but with their moss on municipal works and all that. Those old boys haven't marched with the times ; they know it ; but the moss, what they have and hold, has a paralysing effect. Font says that it affects even him, but it doesn't. He's never really satisfied. That's why it's been such a joy and such a despairing misery at times working under him. To cut the cackle, I have been offered a junior partnership with Mountain and Keevil, but I should have to plank down five thousand of the best——"

"Micky, that can be arranged. I only hold your father's money in trust for you."

"You go on holding it. I feel a mouse when I look at old Mountain. Font describes old Mountain as in labour if he had to deliver me, to some of his mayors and aldermen. And I should not be too tactful with them if they treated me as a mouse. To hark back :—I should love to work with a

clever designer of gardens, a fellow more of my own age. Together, if we hit it off, we might get anywhere——”

“ Anywhere and everything,” murmured Mary. “ A full ambition, my son.”

“ When you call me ‘ my son ’ like that, you put the wind up. You’re a very wicked, sly woman, and at this moment I’ll bet sixpence that you’re thinking of something blighting which has escaped my notice. Out with it ! ”

“ I’m thinking, as you are, about a—partner.”

“ Good for you ! We think alike. A partner looms out of the fog in front of both of us. Tally-ho ! ”

“ I’m thinking of your wife.”

“ Mum—— ! ”

“ It is time you thought about her too.”

“ Business first.”

“ It *is* business, the most important business of all. You won’t get *everything*, and you may get nowhere, if you become a slave to your profession, thinking of that only. Have you never wanted to share yourself with a woman ? ”

She saw him wince. He replied, hesitatingly :

“ I have never met yet the woman whom I wanted to make my wife. I—I have thought about her often. I—I have kept an eye open for somebody not too unlike you.”

“ But only one eye, and at odd moments. If she exists, she is somewhere.”

“ How oddly you say that ? Suffering Snails ! you don’t think that I’m tangled up with any woman, do you ? You can’t see me, *me*, keeping that sort of thing from *you* ? ”

“ You might, but I was not thinking of any such entanglement. I am troubled, Micky, sorely troubled, because I would, if I could, help you to find a wife, and if she were the right wife, I should feel as ‘ bucked ’ as you are over your triumph. That would be my triumph.”

They were sitting together in Mary’s panelled parlour, where she and the children had talked together so often and so intimately. Primrose had turned it into a beautiful room, a tiny labour of love—and an agreeable distraction. In Sheepshanks’ days, the old oak had been black with successive coats of stain and varnish ; the staining had been

removed by a London craftsman ; the oak now was a soft silvery grey that showed up the fine grain of the wood. The fine " bits " of furniture bought by Mary when she purchased the manor had been placed by Primrose in this room. Out of the Graves collection of mezzotints and prints in colour Primrose had hung the best, not too many, upon the walls. The bookcases held Graves' books bound in calf and morocco. The carpet, a gift from Primrose, was a faded Aubusson. Both Primrose and Micky agreed that what had been done was the more satisfactory, inasmuch as the room remained, after their work was done, so characteristic of Mary herself, the right setting for her. Nevertheless to Mary the changes, so admittedly for the better, were more or less negligible. Her mind dwelt on persons, not things ; her room held enshrined memories of happy hours with the children. They belonged to this quaint parlour with its diamond-paned windows and ingle nook, its view across the water-meadows, its fragrance of pot-pourri. It had been to her an oasis in the Land of Nod. . . .

Micky took her hand.

" Now, Mum, you can't play 'possum with me. I believe that you, unbeknownst to me, have been on a little hunt of your own ; and I'm more than half sure that you have found somebody—I haven't the wildest notion who she can be—whom you see as my partner. Own up ! Have you ? "

" Yes," said Mary firmly.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DREAM

#### I

MICHAEL LYNN whistled softly, a trick acquired from Font. He was not surprised at what Mary said, but he couldn't think of any girl in or out of London whom his mother could have picked for him, so he said genially :

" I knew you had something up your sleeve beside your elbow, but I never thought of my extra rib. Name—please ! "

" Bide a wee," said Mary nervously. " What would I look for in your wife ? "

" That's a teaser. I have a hunch that you'd pick a girl too good for me, because you think that no flesh-and-blood charmer would be good enough."

" No," replied Mary, " I'm not such a son-sick fool as that. I should look for love that had stood some sort of test. I should look for somebody who shared your tastes, a companion. That counts so enormously in marriage ; it prevents the little misunderstandings which real understanding laughs at."

" Is her name—Harris ? "

" Michael," she cried passionately. " I have prayed that the right words might be given to me—and you cut a cheap joke."

" Forgive me, it was a vile joke ; but you see, Mum, you know where you are, and I don't. I want a pal. Is it possible that you have found a pal for me ? "

" I—I don't know. There is one woman dear to you, no longer a girl, to whom you are dear, the dearest man in the world, and there is no reason that I can see, *none*, why the

love that you bear each other shouldn't flame into the greater love that would make you both man and wife instead of brother and sister."

"Prim——!" exclaimed Michael.

Then he saw that Mary's eyes were dim with tears. He stood before her—stunned, hardly able to focus his thoughts. For the ordinary traffics of life he had an alert mind, but there was no subtlety in him. There had been none in his father.

"Prim?" he repeated mechanically.

"Our little Prim. Did it never occur to you, that she is not even distantly of kin to us?"

"I thought of her as my sister."

He walked to the window looking out, still dazed, but conscious that he was about to see a new Prim with a sharpness of definition never vouchsafed to him before. He saw her as his little playmate; he remembered that she had wanted to be his sweetheart. And he had laughed at her. The child vanished, the woman took her place. She had ceased for evermore to be his sister. He turned, Mary was in her chair, looking not at him, but at the wood fire that smouldered in the grate. . . .

"But—Arthur?"

She made no reply. He crossed to her, knelt down, and took her hands.

"She loved Arthur," he said hoarsely. "She turned from me when Arthur died; she has never looked at another man. She told me that she asked him to live for her. Would she have told me that, if it wasn't true. What has she got left to give me, if—if I wanted her? Her love for Arthur had a tremendous effect on me. It—it established a sort of standard. It was the real right thing on both sides. And since, again and again, when I've been attracted to some girl or other, I've tried to match the sham love which is of the senses with that love which seemed to me pure spirit. Why, my God! his death nearly killed her; she has never recovered from the shock of it; she never will, never!"

Mary said nothing, agonised because the right words

wouldn't come to her lips. The temptation to take advantage of what she had learned by stealth tore at her.

" You say nothing, because there is nothing to say."

Her hands played with his hair. He continued, in a harder voice :

" You meant well, Mum ; you say you have prayed about this, but—but you have killed the old love for Prim. I—I can't explain it, but you have. I—I feel like rushing away from this house, I—I feel that I can't face her with these new thoughts about her. You have suggested something which defeats me ; you have made me feel a beast. It's awful to say that to you, but I can't keep it from you. Prim, ever since Arthur died, has been sacred to me. As a boy I did think of her sometimes as a little sweetheart, her knight I was, and she my fayre ladye. But all that went before I was twelve. . . ."

## II

At this moment, the tincture of subtlety that was in Mary came to her rescue. She had half expected and feared a different outburst from Michael. Had he said bluntly : " Prim is my sister ; I shall never think of her except as my sister, and, please, say no more," she would have been silenced, but, even as Prim had betrayed the truth when she fell into her trance, so Michael, quite as unconsciously, had revealed himself and his feelings. He was angry, cruel, almost brutal, because the love he bore Prim might be fanned into a fiercer flame. And he knew it, and it seemed to him, naturally enough, almost indecent, aye, even criminal.

" Stand up, Michael," she said slowly, " and look at me."

He rose from his knees ; she rose from her chair and placed her hands upon his shoulders.

" Believe this : no man can see into the depths of a woman's heart. What I have said, I have said in the interests of the two persons dearest to me in the world. Primrose was seventeen when she engaged herself to Arthur, an impulsive child. His death was, as you say, an

appalling shock to her. But when she and I stood beside his dead body, she exclaimed : ‘ I didn’t love him hard enough—I failed him.’ What did she mean by that ? Wait ! I’ll try to answer my question, because you can’t. Let me go back, let me tell you how I felt when she broke without any preparation the amazing news to me. I jumped to the conclusion that Arthur must be a selfish cad, contemptible beyond words to describe. My first glance at his head, as it lay upon his pillow, was illuminating. You are right when you speak of his love for her as spiritual. It seemed to me that the spirit of the man was all that was left ; it had triumphed over the body. His thought, as he lay dying, was to provide for a V.A.D., who might be penniless. He said so ; he had no idea that she was provided for. Apparently—she admitted this afterwards—there had been no intimate, personal talk between them. I guessed then and there that she had offered herself to him. Why ? Because any girl, however inexperienced, can recognise love in its purest essence when she sees it. The love he was feeling for her with no taint of fleshy desires shone out of his eyes. Let us go back again. From the moment I took charge of Prim, I knew—and Mitchie knew—that the child had an instinctive craving for love. Mitchie said, I remember, that she wanted love *inordinately*, her word. She spoke of the child as a getter rather than a giver ; and I thought it too harsh a judgment. Anyway, she got love from you, from me, from Mitchie ; and she bloomed into a strong, happy little creature who learned from us, from *us*, mark you, how to give love, so different from getting love. She wanted to give love to Arthur ; and she gave it. When she gave it, she was giving all that was best in her, regardless, perhaps, of other feelings, other emotions——”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ Search your own heart. A dying man may be purged by pain of what is base in him, but a strong man, or a strong woman, is compound of flesh and spirit : either may prevail, the one against the other.”

“ Yes.”

“ It is conceivable that when Arthur came back to

life, his love for Prim was too pure an essence for her. She had to play nurse ; she did it admirably, but she may have contrasted Arthur with you. For one thing, it was certain that he couldn't be a pal like you, because he was crippled. She went to Wharton Hall ; all her little plans for the future, reasonable enough we must admit, crumbled. When she came back to me, she moped. And so did I. You were away. We missed you horribly. But her reserves baffled me. I supposed, and so did you, that she missed her lover. Did she miss him, I ask you, when we three were in Brittany together ? No—emphatically no. And I began to suspect then that Arthur perhaps had demanded from her a love like his own, and that she couldn't rise to his heights. When he died, she said : ‘ He was ten million times too good for me.’ That cry came from heart and head. What followed ? He left her his money—and a poignant memory. An ordinary girl might have taken the one and let slip the other. Primrose was never an ordinary girl. She is a sensitive, susceptible to suggestion. Mitchie formed her character ; Mitchie imposed upon her certain standards. Environment was stronger than heredity. Mitchie made Primrose what she is—up to a point. But now——”

“ Yes——?”

“ She has recovered from Arthur's death. You said that she had never looked at another man. Only a man could make such a ridiculous statement. She has looked at dozens of men. And, in each case, she has inevitably contrasted them with Arthur and you. She wanted it both ways. She wanted too much. She has never had to consider money, or what is dearer still to many women—security ; she is clever enough to notice how many marriages are disastrous. You ask what she has left to give to you, if—if you wanted her. You would have to want her, because Mitchie has taught her that love must be give and take, not give or take. If you wanted her, it is my conviction, my *conviction*, that she would give you, in full measure, all and possibly more, than you would give her. . . . I have spoken in the interests of you two. The rest lies with you two——”

## III

Michael returned to London—much chastened. During his brief visit it was easy to avoid being alone with Prim. When they were alone for a few minutes, she insisted upon talking about his affairs. In the autumn work would begin upon the public building designed by him for a great town in the north. His presence would be necessary.

He promised to return to Frodsham for the next weekend.

In London, he attempted to adjust his new relationship (or lack of it) to Prim. As yet he couldn't see her clearly, but she took possession of his mind. Even as Mary had foreseen, Prim's money interposed not a wall but a veil. *If she had no money?*—He went to a picture-palace to see a super-film. The hero happened to be a desperate fellow, the hero adored by the British Public. Nothing came amiss to him. He had the ready sword of a d'Artagnan, the wits of Aramis, and the strength of Porthos; the heroine, of course, was lovely, friendless, the prey of wicked men, and (apparently) carried her wardrobe in a bandbox together with a faithful dog. After incredible adventures, the hero was left alone with the heroine, without any visible means of support for himself and wife other than a pair of arms (bare to the shoulder) which, from an anatomical point of view, appeared to be singularly lacking in biceps and triceps muscles. . . . Micky came away laughing, but he was thinking: "There's something in it, something that gets over; the hero had the will to win, because the heroine was so poor and helpless—" Prim was neither poor nor helpless. . . . Nevertheless, it was awful to think of Prim without a man. He had a glimpse of her as Ariadne alone in Naxos. He had wondered now and again what would happen if Prim became a confirmed old maid; he had thought of himself occasionally as an old bachelor; he had supposed vaguely that after Mary's death, a brother and sister would go on living together. . . . It never occurred to him that a man and a woman, not of kin, couldn't live together without provoking scandal. . . .

*Dared he speak to Mitchie ?*

Both he and Mary were concerned about Mitchie. She had always been a bad colour, but now she was yellow as a guinea, and unmistakably less strong and vigorous. She did her duty ; she spent her afternoon with her father when she was at the flat ; but each evening she seemed to sink, tired out, into a chair, folding her capable hands upon her lap, and brooding. Life had been too much for Mitchie, but she refused to admit this.

He did speak to Mitchie—tentatively. He might have held his tongue, but her keen eyes detected distress in his. She spoke first.

“ You were walking about your room last night ? Why ? ”

“ If you heard me, you were lying awake. Why ? ”

“ Impudence ! You have no respect for age or infirmity. Very little sleep suffices me. Are you in any trouble, Michael ? ”

“ Yes ; I am. I’m rattled, Mitchie ; and I hate to be rattled. A talk with you might clear my wits.”

“ If you talk honestly it might. *Who is she ?* ”

Taken aback, he said curtly :

“ Prim. What will stop her drifting ? ”

“ Babies,” replied Mitchie grimly.

“ Well, I’m damned ! ”

“ I shall leave the room, if you swear before me.”

“ You sit tight. I’m going to astonish you. I was thinking of babies when you said babies. Mitchie, can you see Prim with a baby ? ”

“ It would be the saving of her.”

“ Mitchie, do you think I could fall in love with Prim ? Mind you—I haven’t. But if—if I did ? ”

Mitchie gripped the arms of her chair, sitting very upright.

“ When a man wonders if he can fall in love with a woman, he has his toes in the hot water already. Fall in love with her ! Do it ! Don’t talk about it.”

“ But I must. For all these years Prim has been a sister.”

"Perfectly! You couldn't see what was under your nose. She isn't your sister."

"But always I've behaved like a brother to her."

"The more fool you. Tell me something I don't know; when did you wake up to the fact that she wasn't your sister?"

"A few days ago."

"Good," said Mitchie briskly. "I hear in the far distance wedding bells. Are you aware, young man, that I tried to educate Prim to be your wife?"

"You—you educated Prim to be my wife? Incredible!"

"I have a streak of sentiment in me. Your mother's adoption of the child was a perilous experiment, as I pointed out to her at the time. We have this in common, you and I, we both look ahead. I saw two young people educated together, growing up together; and it was plain from the first that you two loved each other. Sooner or later you would realise that you weren't brother and sister. You had character; Prim had not; character had to be imparted. So I did what I could. But I had not taken into account the War."

"Or—Arthur Wharton."

"Or Arthur Wharton."

She closed her lips, slightly compressing them. Micky guessed that she would say no more.

"Prim and I owe an awful lot to you, Mitchie."

"Yes, you do, but your mother has paid the debt—in full."

#### IV

Mary's prayers were answered. Prim and Micky became engaged. It came about far sooner than Mary had hoped or expected. Prim had bought a gramophone, the best on the market, which was placed at the end of the long corridor. When Micky came down for his week-ends, he brought with him new records. Mary had no stomach for syncopated rag-time, stigmatizing jazz music as "decompo-

sitions." When up-to-date records were played, she remained in her panelled parlour.

Micky and Prim listened to the latest valse :

"Come on, Prim, let's foot it."

Micky had not danced with her for several months. He held her in his arms, not speaking, only conscious of the sweet contact. She too gave herself up to the rhythm of the valse, yielding herself to his control, shutting her eyes because she knew instinctively that her great hour had come. Micky was no actor. His attempt to "carry on" as before, to go on treating Prim as a sister, had been ludicrously abortive. She had known within an hour of his talk with Mary that something had happened, some change in him had taken place. . . .

The haunting melody died away too soon.

"We must have that again," said Micky.

The second time she was conscious that he held her more closely to him. Before the valse ended, he stopped, and kissed her upturned face—eyes, brow, cheeks, and lips. They clung to each other in ecstasy. No words were needed, each knew, before the full admission came eagerly from her :

"I always loved you. Kiss me again, and if I faint—I feel faint—kiss me back to life and joy."

Presently they stood before Mary, hand in hand, smiling at her, flushed and hardly articulate.

"It's all right, Mum."

"It couldn't be more r-r-right," stammered Prim.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mary Lynn.

A beatific week followed.

They were so happy—all three of them—that into Mary's heart crept a shadow of fear. Mitchie came down to make a fourth, leaving London as soon as she received Micky's telegram :

*"Engaged. We want you.—Michael."*

Mary's amorphous fear she kept to herself, thinking that her prayers had been too bountifully answered. To see Micky in love brought back his father and the two years they had spent together. It did not bring back the secret they had shared. When Micky was born, a normal baby,

Mary forgot the "taint" in the blood. Who wouldn't? She wished to think only of her boy as he was, not as he might have been. Her fear was the "*metuo secundis*," which affects even children when they exclaim: "It's too good to last, isn't it?" To Mary the pair had become children again, what they were before the War, inseparable playmates. Mary had made certain that Primrose could never look like a young girl again. She seemed to re-blossom during that first week. . . .

At the end of it Micky returned to work. It was now settled that he would marry, settle down in the flat, and look for an expert partner in garden designing. Meantime, he was still bound to Font, the more so because Font, although he needed his services, said kindly: "I can worry along without you." But when Mary, for the second time, declared her intention of selling the manor, a howl of protest went up. With a faintly derisive smile, Mary promised to keep the old house a little longer. . . .

She had kept Prim's secret. The psychic side of Prim distressed her because it puzzled and alarmed her. Otherwise, she might have told the happy pair, making light of the incident, and taking credit, as well she might, for the use she had made of it. Both Micky and Prim did give her credit for insight and tact. Let it rest at that.

## V

Three weeks after his engagement, Micky went to his mother with a frown which she knew well. As a child, she could chase the frown away by covering her face with her hands and saying: "Oh, what an awful face; I can't bear to look at it."

"I say, Mum, Prim has had a beastly dream."

"Indigestion——!"

"She has told it to me, and I want her to tell it to you."

Prim told it. Her manner of telling it would have impressed anybody; probably Micky was aware of that, and distrusted his own narrative powers, but Mary couldn't

determine whether or not he wanted her to be impressed. She gathered somehow that he wished her to make light of it.

Prim told the story of her dream simply, but her facial expression, her command of modulations of tone, her gestures were more eloquent than words.

"It was such a pleasant dream at first. I was alone, passing through fields, in warm sunshine. And as I walked I was thinking of Micky. I was engaged to him, as I am now, hurrying to meet him, but I didn't walk too fast, because it was so heavenly in the fields, and I had no sense of where I was going, only the certainty that I should find him waiting for me, smiling at me. Then I left the fields and walked along a road. I didn't recognise the road ; it was no road about here. I can't express how happy I felt. On the road I dawdled along. I have just told Micky that long ago when I was a child, I used to wake up sometimes before I was called by Nurse, and once or twice I felt so happy that I wanted to die—"

"You wanted to die," repeated Mary.

"Yes ; I never told anybody, not even Micky, but I wanted to die ; I wanted to float out of the window—"

"You had seen Peter Pan."

"Perhaps that gave me the idea—But I remember, as if it were yesterday, that I wanted to go because it seemed to me that I couldn't ever be quite so happy again. The funniest thing was that I didn't seem to have a body at all. That was how I felt as I walked along the road ; I was not conscious of my body. Suddenly I saw a wall and a gate. Through the gate, when I came to it, I saw a courtyard, with a fountain in the wall, and a house beside it, a grey stone house. Above the fountain was a niche in the wall, and in the niche a figure, a painted figure. I lingered by the gate, till I realised that this was the place where I had promised to meet Micky—by the fountain. But, as I passed through the gate, my happiness left me. I didn't want to go into the courtyard, but I went to meet Micky ; I expected him to come out of the house. The door of the house opened, and a little boy ran out, holding a cup. He ran to the fountain, filled the cup with water, and held it out to

me. Then I saw his face. I shrank back, because the boy was an idiot. He held out the cup and gibbered. That is the end of the dream. I woke up—terrified. The boy, poor child, inspired horror. That's all."

The climax came too suddenly for Mary. She gasped, but the others didn't perceive her agitation ; they were looking tenderly at each other. Micky's voice swept his mother back from the past into the present.

" I have told Prim that the last part of the dream, the horrible part about the idiot, is so easily accounted for. You remember our village idiot, Mum ? "

" Yes."

Long before the War Frodsham had held a child of weak mind and deformed body, a boy with a big wobbling head. He would get pennies from the trippers by standing on his head. He knew just enough to know that his grimaces provoked laughter and more pennies.

" He frightened Prim when she was a tiny."

" Yes ; he did," said Primrose.

" It's no use pretending, nowadays, that those childish fears don't count ; they do ; they make a lasting impression, a sort of dent, and anything we hate as kids does crop up again later on. My stupid little hates and aversions crop up with me when I least expect them. So I tell Prim, as you did, that the last part of the dream was indigestion, nothing more."

Mary nodded, recovering her self-possession. What Micky said seemed reasonable to her. She remembered the village idiot perfectly, a gargoyle of a child—long dead. In her quiet even voice, she said soothingly :

" Micky is right. Your dreams have always been a—a disability to you, Prim."

" Perhaps."

" That is exactly what I tell her, Mum."

Little more was said—and nothing by Prim, well aware that both Mary and Micky were slightly intolerant of anything which they could not understand. They had never attempted to understand what was psychic in her or in others. Spiritualism, for instance, was neither accepted nor

rejected by either. Each had too much intelligence to condemn or laugh at it. If Mary spoke about communications from spirits purporting to be young men killed in the War, a topic for the tea-table, she said frankly that she had never attended a *séance* in her life, adding perhaps a phrase or two which indicated distrust of any communication between the quick and the dead. In her opinion persons who believed in Spiritualism became too often obsessed by it, growing indifferent to the claims of this world, indifferent to the claims of their own flesh and blood. Driven into a corner by propagandists, she would declare, reluctantly, that she believed it was "wrong" to peer beyond the veil. . . . That silenced further discussion. But Primrose had talked to many others. From them she had absorbed what explained more or less what was psychic in her. She had accepted herself as a "sensitive"; she had been told that she might develop mediumistic powers. But, thanks to her careful upbringing, obedient to a code of honour never questioned by her, she had refused to attend any *séance*, simply because she was aware that both Mary and Mitchie (leaving out Michael) would be grieved and upset if she did. . . .

## VI

It was settled that the wedding should take place in August.

Prim expressed a wish to remain at Frodsham, a wish comprehended and respected by Mary. "I love Frodsham, because I have been so happy there." Such remarks exacerbate the gods. She was destined by them to be unhappy, wretchedly miserable, in the one place where she deemed herself immune from unhappiness.

*Her dream repeated itself.*

The effect of this repetition caused Mary the gravest anxiety. The girl—she had become again a young girl to Mary—seemed to be wilting before her eyes. When Micky saw her, he was shocked at the change. He had wit enough to know that he was "up against" the psychic side, now unmistakably menacing her peace of mind and his. She refused to listen to what he and his mother called "reason"; she fell back weakly and helplessly upon "instinct." Some

sword, so she affirmed, hung over her head. She clung to her lover, sobbing out her fears ; her sweet caresses maddened him, because his caresses were impotent to wean her mind from what she now called—the “horror.”

*The dream, more vivid than ever, recurred for the third time.*

Three persons—Mary, Mitchie, and Michael—each blessed with strong wills, found themselves impotent in the exercise of their wills against instincts and emotions that defied common sense. History repeated itself, as it invariably does. Prim had appeared to disintegrate after the death of Arthur, but the “reason” for that had come to light. She had told both Mary and Micky that she had believed at the time that Arthur had died because her love had failed him ; she held herself responsible for his death. That sense of responsibility, quickened by the knowledge that she had resolved to marry Arthur loving another man, had nearly killed her....

Clinging desperately to her lover, she whispered :

“Perhaps Arthur sent that dream——!”

“Prim—this is madness.”

“Is it ? He may be wanting me over there, as—as I want you—you—you here. I pledged myself to him. If he is claiming me as his——?”

“My darling, what can I say to you ? Arthur was one of the few unselfish men I have met. Here or there, he would put your happiness first.”

“I—I took his money—I didn’t want to take it ; but I did.”

He was speechless.

“I don’t want to die,” she continued. “I’m—I’m afraid of meeting Arthur——”

“Why should you be afraid of meeting him ? ”

“I’m so—so earthy. You don’t know me ; nobody knows me. Arthur made me think of Heaven. I don’t want Heaven ; I want you. I want you too much——”

Micky felt paralysed. All his protective instincts were quickened, but he seemed to be denied—action. He grasped the fact that Primrose was at war with herself, that spirit

and flesh were at deadly grips. He believed that they should function together ; everybody believed that . . .

He calmed her temporarily, fighting her fears with words and kisses, attempting to squeeze the nonsense out of her. He entertained thoughts of marrying her by Special License. Mary, when he suggested this, said decisively :

“ This is a case for a doctor.”

She sped to London, intent upon finding the right man. You may be sure that she found him, even as she had found Mitchie so long ago. Having found him, she told him of the recurring dream and its effect upon Primrose. Her old friend, who had brought Micky into the world, was dead. A famous specialist listened attentively, jotting down notes. When she finished, he surprised her :

“ Does Miss Cheverton know that you have come to me ? ”

“ Not yet.”

“ These cases are not uncommon, Mrs. Lynn. The key to the problem is suggestion and auto-suggestion. Both are omnipotent—given certain conditions. I wonder whether you, acting under my instructions, could do what I couldn’t do without imposing on my patient explanations which might defeat my ends.”

“ I would do anything.”

“ I understand that you induced the hypnotic condition.”

“ Yes ; at her request.”

“ Before you bring her to me, you might try to induce that condition again. If you fail I will see her. I hope that will not be necessary. I think you will find it quite easy to bring about hypnosis, because the body, you say, is weak.”

“ She is losing weight and colour. We are terrified of a physical breakdown.”

“ Physical and mental, if the sub-conscious mind is permitted to go on controlling her. To-morrow afternoon, tell your son to take her for a long walk. Let him see to it that she comes back tired. Let him leave her in a comfortable chair, alone with you. Take her hand in yours, stroke it, and will her to go to sleep. She may sleep naturally. If so, you must try again. If she goes into a trance, as she did before, you must set yourself to exorcise this tormenting

spirit of unrest. You must will, with all the concentration that you can achieve, that this dream must never recur, and then peace may return, and with it normal health. If you fail, bring her to me."

" And—if I succeed ? "

" If you succeed, I suggest a change. Take her away from Frodsham. A little motor tour through Devon, if she doesn't know Devon. Anywhere you please, provided that the change is complete."

Mary returned to Frodsham in time for dinner.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE AWAKENING

#### I

THE trouble taken by Mary Lynn to find the right man was triumphantly vindicated. *Hypnosis* was induced, and Primrose came out of the trance condition believing that she had fallen asleep after a tiring walk. To Mary, who knew so little of the power of suggestion, the effect was miraculous. Michael and she agreed that what had come to pass so easily might be compared to the wiping of writing from a slate. . . .

Nothing remained but to carry out the doctor's prescribed change. Between Mary and her son (after endless talk) it was further agreed that a honeymoon spent abroad would be the most complete change, provided, of course, that Primrose would consent to be married three months before the date set not by her but by Micky. Five minutes' talk with Font released Micky from any claims that Font might have on him, and Font, as soon as he was told of the "dream," urged upon his pupil the expediency of marriage. Mary saw the doctor, who in his turn backed up Font.

" You say that our patient is nearly herself again ? "

" Her high spirits have come back ; she is gaining weight ; the change is too wonderful."

The doctor re-read his notes. Mary had told him everything except the secret buried in her heart. Ought she to have told him that ? Who dares to say ? When Micky was declared free from any taint by the clever man who brought him into the world, the grateful mother had buried her secret. Exercising her own strong will she had put it from her. It seemed to her, as it would have seemed to any woman of her character and commonsense, that Prim's

dream concerning an idiot child was intimately linked up with the unfortunate village idiot. She had told the specialist about Prim's other dreams, adding that many of them had not come true. Something had been said about *clairvoyance*. So much has been said about *clairvoyance* that nothing more need be added except this : it has been accepted by those who have taken the trouble to weigh the supporting evidence. There will always be an immense number of persons, shrewd enough in matters that concern themselves, who will reject claims which they are too indolent to investigate, claims perhaps which they wish to ignore because their own peace of mind might be imperilled. Mary's consultant had sifted the evidence which in his opinion established *clairvoyance* as a "fact" with which psychologists must deal as honestly as they could, but he had to admit that the "gift" of second sight remained where he had found it, an attribute of the very few, and subject to individual idiosyncrasies and conditions. He had dwelt more upon what he termed "phobias," those instinctive "aversions" which justify the adjective "pet." Rich men are often made miserable by the fear of poverty ; fear of the dark is common to many children. Nearly all the *phobias* to which adults are subject can be traced to childish aversions. If afterwards they affect the adult unhappily, such *phobias* must be dug up out of the mind, and, if possible, exterminated. Unquestionably, the death of Prim's parents imposed upon a sensitive child the fear that she had lost love. That would account for her wanting love inordinately, and for her engagement to Major Wharton. Losing him again must have affected her subconscious mind disastrously, accounting for her devitalisation. Her engagement to the man she had always loved had merely lulled her fear of losing love.

After going thoroughly into the "history" of this case, the doctor advised marriage.

"That will eliminate her *phobia*," he said in conclusion. "It is the best way out of a dark wood, and perhaps the only way."

## II

Primrose eagerly consented to an early wedding ; and seemed to be engrossed by her preparations for it, perfectly happy with the happiness of a child, like a child again in her enjoyment of every passing moment.

The pair were married quietly in Frodsham. Sir George Royal "gave away" the bride ; Frobisher-Bedloe assisted as best man, saying deprecatingly to Mary : "I've never done this sort of thing before." If it hadn't been for her hope of a grandson, Mary might have sung the "Nunc Dimittis." She may have thought that what had happened to Lynn's mother, who had died when her work was accomplished, might be her not too unhappy fate. . . . It is certain that she put such thoughts from her, if they assailed her. . . . Nevertheless, beholding what these two children were to each other and the absorption of each in the other, she must have felt what thousands of mothers have felt : "I have done what I could, what else is there for me to do ?"

Primrose insisted upon going to Brittany for the honeymoon. Her present to the groom had been a saloon car. In it they would visit Caen, Bayeux, and Chartres after exploring the province, a cherished plan of Micky's never carried out since they had left Dinard ; they would drive first from Saint Malo to Quimper and spend a few days at the Hôtel de l'Epée.

From Quimper, Michael wrote to Mary.

"We are having a wonderful honeymoon ; and the moon is at the full. My little 'Flower o' the Moon' has re-bloomed. Everybody who meets her for the first time calls her 'Mademoiselle.' Sometimes, when I am with her, it is difficult not to believe that we are back again in the old garden, playing together at being 'grown-ups.' There doesn't seem to be a cloudlet in the blue (touch wood !) ; and there are no little misunderstandings (touch more wood)—— ! Mum—we talk of you so much, and of all that Mitchie and you did for us when you buried yourself

in Frodsham. Prim wants to buy the old house from you. Then you can live in London with Mitchie. We can let the place, but I hate to think of selling it to strangers.

"There have been no more bad dreams. Prim told me to tell you this. Why should there be—now?

"Every day, we make some fresh expedition. I am hunting up the chapels never mentioned in guide-books, hidden, as a rule, in woods. To some of them the pious make pilgrimages. The Breton saints, whose names I'll spare you, seem to have preserved them. I'm sure that Saint Corentin of Quimper has us under his special protection. . . .

"Mum—it's so good to be alive. My work seems far away, but it's there all the same; and Prim is keener than ever in her ambitions for me. I'll own up to you, best of mothers, that there have been moments when my ambitions scared me, driving everything else out of my head. If it hadn't been for them, I shouldn't have been blind all these years to Prim's love for me. . . ."

Mary laid this letter away with a sigh. She recalled her own honeymoon and the two years that followed it. One could believe in Heaven, because a foretaste of it was vouch-safed to some on this plane. Inevitably, she was constrained to contrast her happiness and the happiness of her children with the dull drab days and years that had been assigned to Mitchie. What memories had she? What had sustained her? There could be but one answer: her faith in God and her sense that she had done her best for others regardless of self. . . .

### III

In mid-May, Micky and Primrose drove to a small village, where they ordered luncheon at a roadside tavern, left the car in the yard behind the inn, and walked across some fields, following a path that led to a chapel in a wood. They walked slowly beneath a warm sun, looking for wild flowers and concerned by the absence of bird life. The *patronne* of the inn had told them that they would find a rough road

leading to the chapel. If they wished to go into the chapel, they must get the key from a farmhouse close by . . .

They wandered on till they came to this road, grass-grown, never used except by the farm people. A two-wheeled cart passed them, loaded with hay. The bells upon the harness of the horses tinkled melodiously away in the distance.

"Let's sit down," said Primrose.

She took off a small *cloche* hat and let the breeze cool her flushed cheeks and play with her auburn ringlets. A fond lover thought : "How captivating she looks." A delicious silence fell upon them which is a benediction of happiness, when two persons almost think as one.

"I could go to sleep," murmured Prim drowsily.

"Have a little doze, darling. I'll keep the flies away."

She put her head upon his knees and closed her eyes, falling asleep at once. There were no flies to keep from her face. The soft air held the fragrance of new-mown hay. They had sat down in the shade of an oak. Looking down the road Micky could see not half a mile away the grey spire of the chapel topping the wood that enshrined it. The *patronne* of the inn, alone with a young husband for a minute or two, had told him that when she was a girl, young married women believed firmly that there was virtue in the water that came from a well blessed by Sainte Anne when she returned to Brittany after her visit to Palestine. The Mother of the Blessed Virgin when blessing the well had ordained that wives who drank from it should be happy mothers. . . . And, even to-day, true believers came from great distances to demand this special grace. . . .

When he had told Primrose, she had laughed, saying : "But, I don't want another baby—yet. I have you." Nevertheless, she had announced lightly her intention of drinking the water, adding : "And then, we shall see what happens. If it should be a wonderful baby, Micky, we should have to give all the credit to Sainte Anne. . . ."

Whilst she slept, Micky attempted to see her with his child in her arms. He had not yet discovered maternal instincts in Prim, save where he was concerned. As a child

she had preferred to play with him rather than with her dolls. He had never heard her croon over village babies. It was impossible to see Mary with a child without recognising maternal instincts in her. It occurred to him that there were no Chevertons and no Lynns closely of kin to Primrose and himself. The Lynns were an ancient family ; so were the Chevertons ; each family had been representative of the lesser gentry of England, part of the minor squirearchy, living quietly upon its own land, undistinguished, giving its sons to the Services and the Church, intermarrying, and gradually in the slow process of time dying out. . . .

Michael frowned, because he was unable to see Prim clearly as a mother. Asleep, she still looked a child—and frail, unfitted to bear burdens.

Her lips parted.

“ Micky——”

She had sighed out his name in her sleep ; she was dreaming of him——

Presently she woke up.

“ I’ve had a heavenly sleep.”

As he bent to kiss her, she held up her hand.

“ Wait—wait,” she whispered. “ Don’t break the spell.”

“ What spell, darling ? ”

“ I am hovering between earth and heaven. I am too happy to be alive. It’s the old feeling of wanting to float out of the window——”

“ And leave me ? ”

“ No, no. Kiss me, hold me tight. I—I don’t want to go. What have I been saying ? Forget it ! ”

As he kissed her, she added :

“ Now I’m awake—and hungry. Let’s see your old chapel and get back to our young chicken.”

They marched down the road.

“ We have been here before,” said Primrose.

“ Never ! ”

“ I know this road.”

“ There are dozens exactly like it. You have seen cows like these cows, but not these cows.”

"How hot it is."

As they neared the chapel, she stood still, pointing at a wall and a gate."

"Micky—"

"Yes?"

"That is the wall of my dream. It is—it is. Yes—the fields—the road—the wall and gate. I'm—I'm frightened."

So was he, but he dissembled.

"Prim—it's just coincidence."

"Very well. I don't want to go on—I want to go back, to—to run, but you shall be convinced this time that some of my dreams come true. If there is a courtyard, and a fountain, and an image in a niche above the fountain, will you believe?"

"We will go back," said Michael.

"No; you and Mum never believed in my dreams."

She ran forward. Michael ran after her. But belief in her strange dream came to him before he reached the gate.

"There!" she said. "Now—do you believe?"

"I believe," he almost shouted at her. "I swear it, Prim. Come back to the inn."

She shook her head.

"The last test of all," she murmured.

"We have had enough, and more than enough."

She gazed at him strangely; and he noticed that there was no fear in her voice when she spoke:

"I'm not afraid. There is no boy. Do you see a boy?"

The courtyard was deserted.

"If there is no boy," said Primrose, "I shall never be afraid of my dreams again. That is the figure of Sainte Anne above the fountain; this is her holy well. I must drink the water—I must—I must."

They passed through the gate.

Half-way across the courtyard, the boy appeared suddenly. He had seen pilgrims approaching from a window in the house. He stood still watching them

*He was a beautiful child.*

He smiled at them.

Primrose said gaspingly:

" That isn't the child of my dream."

" No, thank God ! "

The child ran to the fountain, dipped a cup into it, and turned, holding out the cup.

" Take it from him," said Michael.

Primrose took the cup, staring intently at the child, who was still smiling, asking mutely for a *bénéfice*. Some attempt had been made to dress him in the old costume of the province, the *bras bragous* (rarely seen now), the short jacket, and the felt hat with ribands. Michael thrust his hand into his pocket, as he heard Primrose speak—

" And thy name, my little one ? "

Swiftly, a sort of spasm distorted the child's features ; he began to gibber, making dreadful noises. The tin cup, untasted, crashed to the ground, as Michael caught Primrose in his arms.

She had fainted.

#### IV

The farmer's wife, a pleasant-faced young woman, helped Michael to administer first aid. Between them they carried Prim into the house and laid her upon a bed. The boy had vanished. When consciousness returned, Primrose smiled wanly and lay silent, listening to the story which dripped, as it were, with ever-increasing significance, from the lips of the woman. . . .

She had looked after the child for more than two years. She was poor, yes, but Monsieur and Madame would understand that in Brittany kindness to these unfortunates was a duty. The boy was an orphan with nobody, not a soul, *Ma Doué*, to take care of him, except herself. She was a distant cousin of the child's mother, who had died in giving him birth. For the rest, he more than earned his keep. She had made for him the little costume—which attracted attention—and had taught him to offer the holy water to pilgrims. He had the face of an angel—till he gibbered ! Even the poorest gave him something. And he was no trouble. The Saints had him in their charge, the poor little Michel—

Till this moment, Micky had listened to the good kind creature perfunctorily, engrossed by thoughts of Primrose. Her horrible dream had come true in every particular. What effect would this have on her? Still, he was aware that Primrose, who had demanded details, had been interested in the long-drawn-out story.

"His name is Michel?" she gasped.

"That was his mother's wish, Madame."

"Who was his mother?" asked Michael.

All Bretons are *conteurs de légende*, the gift of narrative is theirs and with it an innate sense of the dramatic. Possibly, too, this rosy-cheeked young woman had told the tale many times, well aware that charitable strangers were moved by it, as—as indeed this beautiful stranger was moved. Accordingly, she took her time, and refused to be hurried. She had barely known the mother, who lived far away. But she had heard of her death. And then three years afterwards an old woman had sent for her, the child's great-grandmother. She was dying. From her lips, she had the story exactly as she was telling it, or going to tell it—such a sad story. And, having heard it, what could she do? The old woman entreated her to take the boy. Finally, with her husband's consent, she had done so. There was a little money, not much, which was paid to her for the child after the old woman's funeral. What made the story so affecting was the fact that if it had not been for this child, the mother might have married quite a well-to-do fellow, who, naturally enough, had refused to marry a girl who had, well, this one little "fault," which had destroyed her good name. There had been a scandal, the tongues of the gossips wagged furiously—

"Please tell me the mother's name," said Michael hoarsely.

"Her name is of no importance to you, Monsieur. I continue."

"Forgive me," said Michael hurriedly, "but I am anxious about Madame. My car is not a mile away. Bad as the road is I will try to bring it here."

"Good! It is as Monsieur pleases. Perhaps Madame wishes to hear the rest of the history."

"Yes," said Primrose. "I do."

Michael shot a hunted glance at her. She knew ; she had guessed. It was impossible to read her thoughts ; her eyes were clouded, half closed, her lips trembled.

"Finish your story," said Michael.

"There is so little more to tell, Monsieur. The old woman told me the truth, but all Carhaix knew it. The father of the child was a compatriot of Monsieur's, a young Englishman. He was walking through the country, a bird of passage. I have forgotten his name, but his Christian name was Michael. My cousin gave him lessons in French, and, well, you can understand what happened, yes. They conjugated the verb, 'to love' . . . And then he marched on, hardly more than a boy, and she remained in Carhaix till her shame killed her. Was it any wonder that her baby was born a *crétin* ? "

"No," sighed Primrose.

"The story is of a sadness, Madame, that ravages the heart. They were so young, so ignorant of life. Who can blame them ? Not I, assuredly. It had to be. My poor cousin's name must be respected, Monsieur. I will tell you her Christian name—Philomèle. That means nightingale, so they tell me. And I like to think, Madame, that Philomèle is singing in Paradise, and that what she suffered here made atonement for her over there. When I look upon the child's angel face, I say to myself : 'If he is the child of love, if he resembles his father, why then his father was not a bad man, just a thoughtless boy.' "

Her voice died away.

v

Michael and Primrose returned to Quimper. The bank-note which Michael thrust into the hand of the farmer's wife astonished her, but she was even more surprised when he told her that he would return, explaining, very haltingly, that as an Englishman he was deeply interested in this son of an English father. He managed to drive the car to the courtyard, and had to carry Primrose to it. . . .

Out of sight of the house, before they turned into the main road to Quimper, Michael stopped the car.

" You forgave me long ago," he said passionately. " You will forgive me now, when I want your love more desperately ten thousand times than I did then ? "

" You have my love," she answered dully. " There is nothing for me to forgive, nothing. I—I knew this morning that we were too happy. . . ."

They clung to each other for an agonising minute.

" He is your child," faltered Primrose. " What will you do with him ? "

" I—I can't answer that question yet."

" He—he looks as you did when I saw you first——"

" He's mine," replied Michael doggedly. " And you are mine. If your love had failed me——"

" Yes ? "

" I should have killed myself."

" My poor Micky ! If you did that you would kill Mum."

" My God ! I—I had forgotten her."

" I—I feel so faint," she murmured.

He drove on.

When they reached their hotel, she went to bed. Michael hurried to a doctor, explaining to him that his wife was suffering from a shock, asking for a mild sleeping draught. Primrose took it and fell asleep. Presently he lay beside her unable to close his eyes, conscious only of a splitting headache, too distracted to think, welcoming severe pain because it made thought impossible. . . .

Primrose, under the influence of an opiate, slept so soundly that he could turn on the light and look at her.

She was his. Nothing else mattered. . . .

## VI

She awoke next morning still slightly under the influence of the drug, too dazed to talk, too tired to get up. He sat beside her holding her hand.

He was drivelingly conscious, as he sat there, of the essential

difference between them, a difference that had made itself manifest when they were children never to be adjusted by training. They had been trained alike by two devoted teachers. What was innate in him was not innate in her. Mary's standards were part of him, the best part ; they were not part of Primrose, merely accretions imposed on her. But they were part of her in the sense that she would strive to retain them, because, as suggestions from without, they had sunk deep into her mind. . . .

He was looking ahead ; she wasn't. She might be looking back. Confronted by a lamentable situation, bristling with terrible difficulties, the man wanted to cope with it, to overcome the difficulties, to rise above them. The woman was incapable of this. And he loved her the more because of her weakness. When his love for a sister began to flame into the deeper love, he had sworn to himself that he would protect her, cherish her, and make things easier for her. She had been "sweet" to him always, eager to please, eager, as a child, to "tag" after him.

"Prim," he said presently.

"Yes?"

"If we went for a little walk——"

"But I couldn't. What are you thinking of?"

"What could I be thinking of—you."

"And him?"

"He is well-cared for. . . ."

"But you can't leave your own son with these poor people ; he has a flesh and blood claim on you."

This might have been his mother speaking. Unconsciously Primrose was echoing her. He answered doggedly :

"I admit his claim on me ; I refuse to admit his claim on you."

"But he has a claim on me because he is yours. If—if he were not as he is——! If—if——"

"If he were not a *crétin*, you mean?"

"Yes. I—I could have taken him away yesterday."

"Prim——!"

"Why not? I should have loved him because he was yours, but now——"

" We must do nothing in haste."

She sighed.

" Why was that dream sent to me ? " she asked in a firmer voice. " Who sent it ? "

" Prim, darling, nobody can answer such questions."

" Arthur may have sent it."

He winced. Since their marriage Arthur's name had never passed her lips.

" Why should Arthur send it ? "

" As a warning, I suppose."

" A warning against your marriage with me ? "

" It may be so."

" If it were so, we are married. Nothing can alter that.

" We—we love each other ; we are together rain or shine."

" Perhaps it is bad, wrong, for a woman to love a man as I love you ? "

" Put such thoughts from you."

" But—I can't. I failed Arthur ; perhaps I shall fail you."

" Never ! "

## VII

Twenty-four hours later, he despatched a telegram to Mary, asking her to come to them. He begged his mother not to be alarmed, and to allay her anxiety (and silence possible gossip at the village post-office) added : " We want to consult you on a most important business matter."

It was Primrose who expressed a wish to see Mary. In all weaklings faith in the strength of others remains an overwhelming instinct to the end. Physical weakness had assailed her. She was wilting again before Micky's eyes ; and he could do nothing. She refused to see a local doctor, repeating like a child : " I'm only tired ; I want to lie still ; I shall be ever so much better soon."

She lay in his arms, half-asleep, for hours, taxing even his strength and endurance ; she seemed to be terrified of his leaving her even for a few minutes. . . .

Mary arrived.

A private sitting-room adjoined the bedroom. In this

room Michael told Mary the story of Philomèle. . . . She listened calmly till he came to the scene in the courtyard and the catastrophic appearance of the *crétin*, a beautiful child, but idiotic.

“An idiot——!” she exclaimed. “Oh-h-h !”

The anguish in her tones provoked an exclamation from Michael. He had never seen his mother swept out of herself ; and, naturally enough, he supposed that the poignant cry which escaped from her indicated distress at the story, revulsion against his part in it. She was staring at him with horror in her eyes——

“Mother—you *hate* me for this ?”

The passionate interrogation in his tone pierced her heart. She forgot that Primrose was in the next room ; she forgot everything concerned with the present ; she had been whirled back to the house in Kensington Square ; she seemed to see not Michael but his father, to hear him speaking of the dreadful taint that had afflicted him so cruelly—and her.

“No, no,” she cried. “Hate you ?—It is the taint, the taint that fills me with horror.”

“What taint ?”

“I never told you ; I—I couldn’t tell you. I—I buried it—*here*,” she touched her bosom.

“What did you bury ?”

He stood up ; so did she. They had raised their voices, as people do in moments of strong emotion. Each had supreme need of the other ; each was conscious of a space between them, a gulf of misery, that must be bridged instantly, that could only be bridged by love. Michael was thinking, not clearly but insistently, of his debt to his mother ; she was thinking in the same intense way of the horror that must pass from her to him, that couldn’t be hidden from him. Neither heard the door creak as it opened.

“Your father was born like your son—an idiot.”

“My father——!”

“His father ?” repeated Primrose.

They turned to see her in her nightgown, standing in the open doorway, with her hand still upon the handle of

the door, and the horror, the misery, the pain in both their hearts were unmistakably revealed in her eyes.

A full explanation was unavoidable. It was made by Mary, sitting beside the bed of Primrose. Michael persuaded her to get into bed, conscious that she shrank from the touch of his hand. Shock seemed to have stimulated her mind. She listened attentively to what Mary said, keeping her piteous eyes on her.

"I understand, Mum. And I know now why my dream was sent—a warning against my marriage. If I have children they will be idiots."

"Prim!" exclaimed Michael.

"Your son is an idiot. Mum used the right word—taint. Why was that dream sent to me?"

Neither Mary nor Michael could answer her question.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE GATE OF SORROWS

#### I

NOT far from Quimper, facing the Baie de Douarnénez, is a village, one of the most peaceful spots in France save for three months in the year, when English and French tourists are ubiquitous. There is a big hotel open for these three months, and there is a small inn built of granite open all the year round. From the terrace in front of it one can see the sardine boats putting out from Douarnénez and now and again a swift-sailing *thonnier* from Belle Île. Under the blue waters of the bay, so the old women will tell you, lies the city of Ys, submerged for its many sins—a miniature Atlantis. The old women believe that prior to any great storm, those storms which take heavy toll of the fishermen, the sound of bells from the city of Ys comes floating across the waters of the bay.

To this sanctuary Michael Lynn and Mary brought Primrose at the beginning of June. The little inn was swept and garnished, ready to receive July holiday-makers. Any visitor in June was welcome.

Both he and Mary were prepared to take Prim anywhere, to do anything, which might restore her to health. The Quimper doctor could only make gestures, drop platitudes, look wiser than he felt, and hazard conjectures. Madame was suffering from shock. Her heart had been affected, but not organically. Fresh air, rest, good food—these would restore her to health.

Her terrible apathy seemed to increase day by day. She was sweet to Michael, submissive to Mary, but her love of life had suddenly ceased to be.

She entreated them not to take her back to England.

" If I am to get well, I shall get well here."

Mary wrote at great length to the London psycho-analyst, who told her to try once more suggestion. Prim shook her head.

" It won't do any good this time," she said. " I should have to believe that you could help me. Nobody can help me."

" She will die," said Michael desperately, " simply because she is afraid of life."

" I felt what she is feeling," murmured Mary.

" But there is no taint in her."

" How can we tell? We represent three old families who are dying out."

" You have thought of that; so have I; so does she, poor darling."

Before the end of June, Primrose told Michael that a baby was coming, adding calmly:

" When it comes, we shall both go."

Two strong wills united failed to banish this conviction; weakness prevailed over strength. Arguments were met with the helpless affirmation: " I was warned."

## II

Acting on her own initiative, without a word to Michael Mary made a pilgrimage to Sainte Anne's well and saw her grandson.

Her grandson——!

She took the child's guardian into her confidence. The woman wept bitterly, torn in two between the affection she had for the child and her avarice. He was a source of income. However, it was arranged for the present that he should remain at the farm. Had the child shown any signs of intelligence? Yes; now and again there was a flicker of reason; it might be said that he was less of a little animal than he had been, able to recognise certain persons, especially those who were kind to him. He sat beside Mary, staring at her. When she stroked his head, he smiled.

Finally, it was agreed that Madame, on payment of a small compensating sum, could take the child away when she was ready to do so.

Mary allowed Michael to believe that she had spent the day in Quimper.

Meanwhile hope crept back into Michael's heart, because Primrose seemed to be happier, able at any rate to be happy in his company, unhappy if he was out of her sight. Her love for him never failed. The weeks glided by monotonously. Whenever he looked at her, Shelley's lines in the *Sensitive Plant* recurred to him :

*The naiad-like lily of the vale  
Whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale.*

They returned to Frodsham at the beginning of July.

Immediately there was a change for the better in her physical condition, a slight increase of weight. She refused to speak of the future, trying to resurrect the past, taking almost childish pleasure in seeking out the places where she and Michael had been so happy as children. During their absence in France Mitchie's father had died. Mary went to her. Michael made many little expeditions in the car to Rye and Winchelsea. Calls had to be returned. Primrose had been taught by Michael to drive the new car, which amused and distracted her. He failed to determine whether she was dissembling with him when she laughed and joked with him over trifles. Of what confronted them, of the tiny life that would have been so much to them, he dared not speak, because she had whispered to him a piteous entreaty :

“ It has to be. If I think about it, or talk about it, I shall be miserable again. I'm not like Mum ; I'm not brave. Let us be happy, Micky, and that may help so much.”

He believed that it did help ; so did Mary. To make and keep her happy engrossed all his energies.

They were returning from Rye in the car with Primrose driving, when a dog ran across the road. Michael saw it and gasped out : “ Don't swerve ! ” Instinctively, being a novice, Primrose attempted to avoid it, and did so, but,

at the pace they were travelling, the car struck a high bank and nearly overturned. The impact hurled Primrose against the driving-wheel. Michael seized it and stopped the car. Very slight damage was done to that ; and in less than two minutes they were laughing over what might have been a serious accident. Primrose had to confess that she was slightly bruised and shaken. Michael drove home. . . .

At dinner Primrose was taken ill. The family doctor, hastily summoned, remained at the manor house all night. Early in the morning, Michael was told that one terrible burden of apprehension had been taken from Primrose, but the doctor's face alarmed him, and his repeated injunction to keep her quiet and free from excitement seemed so unnecessary when he saw her lovely face smiling at him.

"I shall soon be well again," she murmured.

He sat beside her holding her hand, more at ease than he had felt for six anxious weeks. Presently she whispered :

"It won't worry you if we have no children ; you will have me ; I shall have you."

"Yes, yes, yes. Don't think of anything else."

She fell asleep still holding his hand. A nurse had been summoned from Hastings. Her somewhat stolid countenance revealed nothing. But, later, as soon as he was alone with Mary, she attempted to prepare him as gently as possible for complications.

"What is wrong ?"

"The heart. This has been a dreadful strain on that."

"You mean she might go suddenly ?"

Mary bowed her head, unable to speak.

"If that happens," said Michael, in a hard voice, "it will be the end for me."

"My son, I have never been afraid of death ; I have been afraid of life unworthily lived, degenerating into death in life. If I saw you turning your head from the Light, sinking into abysses of despair I should pray that you might be taken and perhaps I should be allowed to follow you soon."

"That is mother's love, so different from a man's love for his wife."

"Is it? Are you sure? I am finding out that love, the only love that is imperishable, is the same; and that love is the Light; the other is darkness."

## III

Next day, he perceived that Primrose suffered intermittently from fits of breathlessness, which she made light of. If she talked too much they came on at once. All that day he remained by her side with hope ebbing out of him. The windows of her room were wide open, but outside the air was heavy and sultry. At six rain fell in torrents and distant thunder was heard. There were occasional flashes of lightning.

At seven, the storm rolled away and the sun came out, still high in the heavens. Was it a sign of good omen? The face on the pillow seemed less white and drawn.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked.

"I'm feeling heavenly," she whispered. "Will you turn on the gramophone. I—I want to hear that valse to which we danced in the corridor."

The nurse was sitting in the corridor. Michael put on the record, saying to her: "Play it twice." The nurse nodded, beginning to wind up the motor. Michael went back, leaving the door ajar.

Listening to the soft strains, she fell asleep, and in her sleep her tired heart ceased to beat. She died as a child sometimes dies; and it was difficult to believe that she had passed away. . . .

## IV

Mary took Michael to the room he had occupied when a child, next to her own bedroom. Was her son going under, into the nether-world of the millions who are so unhappy on earth and such a source of unhappiness to others? Was he porcelain or pottery?

He seemed to be stunned, incapable of speech, too dazed

to listen to what she said. When he did speak, he began to curse himself. Why had he taken her to France—why—why—why?

It was hopeless to reason with him.

She remained with him till his passion of self-reproach had spent itself. Then she led him back to his wife, more lovely in death than she had ever looked in life. It was as if some miraculous hand had been laid upon her, as if she had been healed of all pain and trouble. The dignity of the dead lay like a benediction upon her.

"It is well with her," whispered Mary. "Can you look upon her sweet face and doubt that?"

She went out of the room, softly closing the door.

v

Primrose was buried not far from the place where little Rosamond Bunday had been laid to rest. Villagers who wandered into the churchyard to look at the wreaths piled high upon the new grave may have wondered if they saw one wreath of white roses lying upon an old grave under a yew. None guessed that it had been placed there by Mary Lynn.

Before starting on her honeymoon, immediately after her marriage, Primrose had signed a will leaving all that she possessed to her husband. After a fashion little foreseen by her this affected Michael disastrously, taking from him the incentive to work. It is true that he had worked hard with love of his work animating him, the greatest driving force of all, but back of this, imposing on the boy many acts of self-denial, had been his determination to accept as little money as possible from his mother, a determination strongly approved by Mitchie if not by Mary. He had now ample independent means and, unfortunately, time loose on his hands.

Before they left France Mary told him that she had seen his son. He was so dazed by grief that he took for granted that a capable woman would see to it that the

unfortunate child was cared for. He asked no questions ; and she guessed that the mere thought of the boy was torment to him, the innocent cause of suffering and remorse not to be measured by her.

When Mary said to Mitchie : " What can we do with Michael ? " she was answered curtly :

" What we *have* done, Mary, is going to be tested. This is a last test of him and—*us*. There is nothing more that we can do, nothing. Why do you look at me so strangely ? "

" I am thinking that for once you are mistaken. Before I explain what I mean, will you tell me why I seem to see a great change for the better in you ? I noticed it at once, as soon as I saw you."

Colour flowed into Mitchie's sallow cheeks ; her eyes brightened. Slowly, almost unwillingly, hating all demonstrations, she took Mary's hand and pressed it.

" You can't guess ? "

" No."

" And yet you are a woman of great intuitions, of deep sympathies. What did you feel when our children flitted away after their wedding ? That your work was done ; that you were left alone. And *that*, Mary, is what I have felt for a long time."

" You—you have found work ? "

" Would it distress you, if I left you ? "

Mary's grip upon Mitchie's hand tightened.

" I—I could hardly bear it—now. But I must think of you. . . . I—I understand."

Mitchie's rare smile illuminated her face.

" You don't quite understand. It is your need of me, Mary, that has cleared my eyes and my ugly skin. My work is not over, if you need me, and when Primrose died I knew that you would. Don't kiss me ! If you do, I shall burst into tears ; and I look such a fright when I cry. Now—why am I mistaken in my conviction that our Michael, with such weapons as we have given him, must fight this battle with himself, and conquer himself by himself ? "

" Come into the garden," said Mary, " and I will tell you."

Michael left England soon after his return to Frodsham. The Council in the great northern town, who had accepted his designs, gave him three months' leave of absence, partly under pressure from Sir Claud Font, partly, also, for reasons of their own which will appear presently. Mary urged him to take a long sea voyage, suggesting South Africa, because so often he had expressed a wish to visit his father's grave. On the eve of departure he had a talk with Mitchie. Both she and Mary were incapable of dealing with a side of him which had not escaped their notice when he was a boy—his obstinacy. He had been ever obstinate in pursuit of his objectives, but obstinate then, so they fondly believed, in the right direction. Obstinacy, nothing else, in his determination to paddle to Rye, utterly regardless of the difficulties of the return journey, had brought about his illness ; obstinacy had nearly killed him. Obstinacy had kept his nose to the grindstone in Font's office, but that might be called by his friends—tenacity of purpose.

He was as obstinate in his grief as he had been in his joy of life and his great gift of recognising and acclaiming beauty in life. When joy was taken from him with such appalling unexpectedness, there seemed to him to be nothing left but sorrow ; and he stood in the gate of his sorrows alone and aloof. To make matters worse for Mary, his tenderness and consideration for her had not failed. Without any reassuring word from him the temptation to follow Primrose out of a world which had become “a sterile promontory, the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me, than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.” He had echoed Hamlet's words, and like Hamlet he walked alone with his brooding thoughts, fearful of imposing them on, or sharing them with, his mother.

His talk with Mitchie took place in the old schoolroom, still regarded as Miss Mitchell's “own.” It held her beloved books and her framed photographs. It held too photographs of her “pupils,” presented to her by them. It held ten thousand memories of childhood. . . .

" I can leave home, Mitchie, with a lighter heart because you are here with Mum. Persuade her to sell the old place, even at a loss, if necessary."

" Why ? "

" You know—why. She loves London—so do you. She has held on to Frodsham to please me. You will both be happier in London. There's the flat. Live in that."

" Micky——!"

" I would rather you called me Michael."

" Perfectly. So—you are considering our happiness ? "

" What else is there left for me to consider ? "

" Your own."

" You can cut that out."

" Then I shall call you Micky, and treat you as a child. It is childish in you not to recognise that our happiness is bound up in yours. I'm not such a fool as to think that any words from me will help you. I hold words to be cheap. Actions count. Have I tried to educate a man or a mouse ? At this moment, I am asking myself : *have I failed ?* It was a perilous experiment for two women—never have I blinked at that—trying to make a man out of you, but, all said and done, a man must make a man out of himself. Humpty-Dumpty couldn't do it, because he was an egg. I told you that when you were twelve years old."

" I remember."

" I must make this a personal matter between you and me, much as I detest to talk about myself. Suffering has always been, and always will be, the cross imposed upon humanity. It comes to all of us sooner or later. Finite minds cannot account for it. Why do some children suffer horribly ? And they bear their sufferings with greater fortitude than men, because, perhaps, they are nearer to God. I have suffered nearly all my life, and I am like you in this : I have not carried my sufferings to others. It has been the other way about with me. I had to fight my sufferings tooth and nail. My work helped me enormously ; and I had to work. I have sat in this room teaching you children when my head was splitting. My work was my salvation."

" I am the last of the Lynns," said Michael stiffly.

"Are you? Then see to it that you are not the least of the Lynns. You are leaving us, and you are right to leave us, a sorely stricken man, or shall I say a sorely stricken boy, but you will come back—unless all the work done in this room has been wasted—bigger and better for your sufferings. Say 'Amen' to that! Say it!"

"Amen," said Michael. "Words *are* cheap, Mitchie, and actions—"

"Precede and follow reactions. Enough!"

"But—you will persuade Mum to sell Frodsham?"

Mitchie hesitated.

"I make no promises. Your mother, years ago, spoke of this place as the Land of Nod."

"Yes—a place of exile to her—and you."

"At first; but—here again it makes for furious thinking—we learn to hug our chains. Frodsham is dear to both of us, although I'm still afraid of cows! Your mother would miss her garden. She may wish to live here. There might be a reason for wishing to live here. . . ."

She shot a glance at him, but he merely nodded, obviously not interested in any particular reason. His words confirmed this:

"You will talk it over with her. I daresay you are right; it's so remote, so quiet, and it's hers, her own tiny domain. She must please herself."

## VI

He sailed away.

Mary Lynn did not sell the old manor; she had uses for it which she had explained to Mitchie in the garden, close to a fountain which recalled a fountain blessed by Sainte Anne. The garden had been secluded when she came to it, but it was even more so now, shut off from the road that skirted it by high shrubbery and trees. The fountain again was in a small pleasureance enclosed by a privet hedge. Here the children had worked in summertime; and here Mary liked to sit and listen to the music of the falling water, the faintest tinkle of sound.

In the middle of September, she and Mitchie travelled to Quimper ; and thence to the farm-house. She could detect no change in the boy, but Mitchie was tremendously impressed by the likeness to Michael, the same eyes and brow surmounting delicately modelled features inherited from his mother.

To their surprise, he came to Mitchie and stood beside her, interested rather than curious. But, long ago, Mary had noticed, with a twinkle in her eye, that Mitchie had a "lure" for children, just as some persons attract strange dogs.

"He looks intelligent," said Mitchie in English.

"Do you say that because he goes to you ?"

Mitchie took the boy's hand, and repeated his name in her soft voice.

"Michael——"

"He knows his name," said the woman quickly ; "and that is about all he does know. If you give him a sou, he will give it to me."

"Let us test that," said Mitchie calmly. She turned to Mary : "Give him a franc."

Mary held out a franc ; the boy took it eagerly. Without a word Mitchie held out her hand, keeping her eyes on the boy, indicating by a gesture that she wished him to give the coin to her. After a moment's hesitation, he did so.

"Intelligence is there," said Mitchie. "May I be left alone with him ?"

Afterwards she told Mary what had happened, so little but something—a straw to clutch at. She had juggled with the coin, making it vanish and reappear. The boy had smiled ; and he responded to her smiles, as a baby does. . . .

After a couple of days, when Michael had grown accustomed to them, he went away willingly enough with them, betraying neither alarm nor excitement. That might or might not be a good sign. He had to be washed, dressed, and fed as if he were a baby.

At Southampton, a nurse, accustomed to wait upon mentally deficient children, met the ladies at the South-Western Hotel. They travelled to London that same day and took

the child to Sir Dunstan Tarrant, the alienist, commended by the specialist who had been so interested in Primrose. After the usual tests and innumerable question, Sir Dunstan spoke cautiously :

" I think this a case, Mrs. Lynn, that may yield to treatment. I will avoid technicalities, but quite lately, as you probably know, we have greatly advanced our knowledge of certain glands. We know, for example, that a defective pituitary gland may be the cause of abnormal development of the body. Cretinism is due to defective thyroid glands. In France and here we have attempted gland-grafting, but that will not be feasible. Forgive me, but is expense an object ? "

" None," said Mary.

" If that is the case I suggest that I keep this child for some months under my personal supervision. I know of a nursing home where he will have every care. The treatment will be internal, quite simple, a treatment that will nourish these defective glands. In less than three months, I shall look for a change. If the child responds more quickly, he might leave the home in three months. Good country air and food will do the rest."

" I place him unreservedly in your hands, Sir Dunstan."

" Thanks. It is impossible to hold out more than hope. Some of these cases are baffling."

" The child's grandfather became normal when he was seven."

" But you don't want to wait till then to see what happens ? "

" No."

Accordingly Michael was taken to a home, which really looked like a home ; and both Mary and Mitchie had the pleasure of seeing a child about the same age as Michel, who made no horrible inarticulate noises, but crowed like a lusty baby and had mastered already a baby's vocabulary of about a dozen words. The matron in charge said pleasantly :

" Sir Dunstan regards these children as his. He fusses over them as if they were his."

Mitchie bestowed a smile on her.

## VII

Michael delayed his return to England till the last possible moment. It was difficult to read—even between the lines—from his letters how it was with him, inasmuch as he hardly mentioned himself, but he wrote at length describing his impressions of South Africa, touching now and again upon its domestic architecture. Mitchie came to the conclusion that his work was beginning once more to commandeer his attention. He knew, before he came back, all that Mary wished him to know about Michel. He supposed that the child had been placed by her in some establishment in France for the mentally deficient, where he would have the best of care.

In his last letter, he had asked his mother to meet him at the flat in London, expressing mild regret that she had not sold Frodsham. "You will understand," he wrote, "that I don't wish to go there till my work in the north is done; it would be too painful. You can tell Mitchie with my love that I am less of a mouse."

Mary met him at the docks, not far from the spot where she had stood when her husband sailed for South Africa. Michael had visited his grave. Nearly twenty-seven years had passed since that tall soldierly figure had faded from her sight, but she remembered the grave smile on his face, the anxious look in his eyes. Would he be proud of the son coming back to her?

As the huge liner approached the wharf, she saw him, erect as his father, standing a little apart from the other passengers. Then he moved nearer to the gangway. She could see that he was much bronzed, a thought thinner, perhaps, with lines upon his face. He waved to her—boyishly; and she waved back. . . . Five minutes—that seemed as many hours—passed; and she was in his arms, hugged masterfully.

"Michael! My boy!"

Regardless of amused and interested eyes, he stared at her with hunger in his eyes. Then, to her intense relief, he laughed:

" Why, Mum, what have you been doing to yourself ? "

" I am stouter ; I know it."

" You are younger—"

" What nonsense ! Still, it is true that I am a well-nourished old woman. But you, my son, how is it with you ? "

He answered inconsequently :

" Our tags are such lies, Mum. If I could write half as well as you do, I should nail them to the mast as lies. I left England believing one of 'em to be true. If I changed my skies, I should not change my mind, but the mind that can see new skies must change. We have plenty of time, let's walk away from the crowd—"

As the luggage came ashore, he explained.

" Before we crossed the line, my mind readjusted itself. I dared not write to you about it, because I was not sure of myself. Mitchie and you tried to teach me 'values,' but I had to reconsider revaluations. And I had to get out of myself. What a brick you've been ! And, on board—was it the instinct of the builder ?—I had to hunt up other bricks, to talk to 'em, to suck something out of 'em. There was lots of material—hard stuff, soft stuff, hard and soft stuff mixed. I met men twice my age, going to a new country to begin life afresh ; I met women, plucky darlings, all labelled : ' Try again.' They changed my skies and my mind. Mum, you blessed old Mum, I stood by my father's grave, and there I revalued myself, and felt dirt cheap—"

She pressed his arm. It seemed to her that the father had come back—come back to stay. Would he speak of Primrose ? Would he speak of his son ? Presently he did.

" I can never marry again ; you know that. When Prim died, something died in me. I thought it was love ; it wasn't. What died was gratitude. Because one great thing had been taken, nothing else counted. I had no stomach to reckon what was left. I returned like a dog to the vomit of dead desires. I wanted the flesh and blood woman. I hoped that she would come back to me in my dreams ; I—I willed her to come back. She never came—not once, till the revaluation. And then I had a glimpse of her, not

the little Primrose we knew, not a flower o' the moon, but a spirit. I believe that she is with my father, that he met her when she crossed over, that he took care of her. In my dreams of her she is never alone. Is it just imagination, or is it possible that the other is with her—Philomèle ? ”

“ It may be so, Michael.”

“ You wrote to me that the child was in some home ? ”

“ Yes—he is.”

“ Under treatment ? ”

“ Under the best treatment possible.”

“ I knew you would do that for me.”

“ Do something for me. The child may live to be a blessing to you. But you must have patience. You are going north to give undivided energies to your work. When you come back I will take you to see the child. Till then ask me no questions about him. When you saw him last he gibbered at you ; he gibbered at me. That would upset you terribly ? ”

“ Yes, but——”

She held up her finger.

“ No questions.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HAIL AND FAREWELL

#### I

MICHAEL went north after two days spent in London. There are moments in our lives when the stoutest friends are as reeds shaken by the wind of their own verbosity. But the little help that they can give in a drab present foreshadows substance in the future. Michael had fled into his Land of Nod—to be alone. He came out of it fortified by his intercourse with strangers who had rekindled his sense of gratitude, strangers buffeted and bludgeoned as he had been, who offered no sympathy knowing nothing of his afflictions, who exacted sympathy because they were not asking for help from a chance fellow-traveller. As soon as he arrived in London both Font and F.B. hastened to him. These two men, so different, were his best friends. They were much older and infinitely wiser. One salient result of being educated at home had imposed upon Michael, even as a small boy, the companionship of “grown-ups.” Necessarily, he had little in common with the average schoolboy. When he became a man the difference between himself and other young men remained exactly the same ; he was distressingly conscious of the difference, not priggishly proud of it, but proud, perhaps unduly so, of the interest he excited in older men who accepted him on more or less equal terms.

Font was labelled by the world “Success” ; F.B., in his prim, deprecating, ironic fashion, labelled himself “Failure.” Nevertheless Font and F.B. were “pals.” Probably, each had found in the other something lacking in himself.

Font asked Michael to dine to meet F.B. The three dined delicately at a famous club. Font loathed gluttons, and had a palate for the nobler red wines ; F.B. ate and drank what

was set before him, exasperatingly indifferent to what might be provided by a generous host. Font said that this was a "pose." After dinner the three men lit large cigars, sank into large chairs and intimate talk.

The talk circled about Michael without attacking him. Font surveyed his young guest (and pupil) with a kind but boisterous eye; F.B., lying back in his chair, annotated Font's remarks, disdaining his superlatives. Michael was aware that he was being dissected, and oddly amused because the operation was painless. The anaesthetic of sincere affection appeared to deaden action and quicken sensation. . . .

After skirmishing about him, they assailed him openly.

" You are going to have a devil of a time up north," said Font.

" The Philistines will smite you with their favourite weapon," murmured F.B.

" Not being an ass the poor boy can't fight 'em with their pet weapon."

" Are you pulling my leg ? " asked Michael.

" The Professor," said Font lightly, " is concerned with the defects of your character, Michael, whereas I, being an optimist, dwell more happily upon your ' pep ' and ' push. ' "

" Am I in for a ' pi-jaw ' ? "

Font threw away his cigar and lit a pipe.

" We want you to stand and deliver your goods. We can guess what took you to South Africa ; what have you brought back ? Come—spit it out, my boy ! "

" Expectorate freely," said F.B., in a pained voice.

There was a silence, always more impressive in a very large room, most of all in a cathedral. The club was not much used by members at night. These three had a huge smoking-room at the top of the building to themselves. Suddenly, Michael felt that he was transported to the Hall of the Knights at Mont Saint-Michel. He recalled his boyish ambitions as he stood there long ago, and the wonderful silence that had encompassed him. But the silence of the smoking-room was not perfect. The distant roar of London traffic rumbled through closed windows and heavy curtains. He was in the heart of a gigantic city, aware of its throbbing

pulses, its insistent "call," aware too, after the fresh breezes of the Atlantic, of its pervasive, indescribable "smell." In the Hall of the Knights lingered the smell of the centuries; at Frodsham there was the smell of the marshes and the "tang" of the sea....

He could not speak to these men as he had spoken to his mother upon the wharf at Southampton. There, regardless of time and space, speech had burst out of him; he had to speak under her constraining gaze. Now, these two friends demanded delivery of the "goods," and they would accept nothing "shoddy." He wriggled.

"Are we asking too much?" asked F.B. hesitatingly.

"No—we're not," replied Font.

So—they had talked him over.... And the spirit of discussion, dear to both, had informed their talk. Michael could hear Font laying stress upon his pupil's "pep" and "push"; and he could hear the Oxonian qualifying too generous praise, placing his thin fingers upon the "weak spots," shaking a dubious head, hypercritical and yet tolerant of human infirmity, doubting others because he doubted himself....

## II

"I owe you plain speech," Michael began slowly. "What I owe to others bothers me. It's a big load, bigger than it was when I went to South Africa. But I'm not scared of that; I was scared when I refused to shoulder it.... Dear old Mitchie used to have her little dodges when she taught me history. I liked to play with fire. I remember building a camp fire too near our old barn, and I came within an ace of settling alight to it. Mitchie said: 'Don't play with fire; remember the Great Fire of London, September the 26th, 1666.' Just now, when you two fellows challenged me to expectorate freely, I thought to myself: 'Don't spit! Remember the flood!'"

Font laughed.

"He's O.K., Bedder; I told you so. When a man can laugh at himself, all is reasonably well. We don't want the

flood, Michael. As the sands of the desert are to the weary traveller, so is overmuch speech to him who loveth silence."

" Then why do you talk so much ? " asked F.B.

" I talk, my poor Bedder, to provoke talk in others. Go ahead, Michael."

" I must make good up north. I know what I'm up against ; the contractors have warned me——"

" Very thoughtful ! You watch *them*."

" I shall. The Philistines have girded up their loins. They are howling for changes of plan——"

" Don't I know their yapping—— ! Fat, greasy towsers ! "

" They can bark and bite."

" Bark and bite back. Worry—worry—worry ! "

" I shall do my job——"

" I said you would—no skrimshanking—— ! But—*afterwards* ? "

" I—I have not made any definite plans yet."

" Sorry to hear that," said Font. Then, dropping his light tone he spoke with the authority of the Master, predicting what might happen, if—if his pupil made good. There would be offers of work upon similar lines, tempting offers. Was he going to bury himself in the provinces, accept their loaves and fishes ? He had independent means. Would he take things easy ? He was at the cross roads. Did he know it ? "

When he finished, F.B. observed quietly :

" We've had the flood, Michael, but I associate myself with every word that our distinguished host has said."

It was good to have such friends, genuine well-wishers, even if the "flood" was overwhelming. They had detected his "weak spot." The determination to do what he had pledged himself to do was dominating, but—*afterwards*. Once more, the *wanderlust* had taken grip of his imagination. The spade work of his chosen profession dismayed him, the long hours at a drawing-board, the necessity of pleasing others, the interminable calculations, the strenuous competition. . . . He had thought of taking his mother round the world. Would she leave Mitchie ? Did she want to go round the world ? Did he crave fame ? Would it mean

anything to him if initials were added to his name? He recalled some lines:

*We live till Beauty fails and Passion dies,  
And Sleep's our one desire in every breath.  
And in that strong desire, our old love, Life,  
Gives place to that new love whose name is Death.*

But Beauty—thank God!—had not failed him. Beauty remained. He was beginning to look for beauty in unexpected places, to see it where he had never seen it before—underlying seeming ugliness, shining out of dark places, like human hearts, a beacon.

Being honest, he had to admit to his friends that he asked for time to consider the “afterwards.”

“Time,” murmured F.B., “elaborately thrown away.”

“Elaborately is good, Bedder. Yours?”

“Young’s. Does anybody read Young nowadays?” He gazed pensively at Michael. “We have rushed you—not quite fair. I am an awful warning of time elaborately thrown away. You are going to tackle a big disagreeable job in the right spirit.”

“Why do you rub it in that it will be so disagreeable?”

F.B. glanced at Font, shrugging his shoulders. Another “flood” might be expected. It came.

“During your absence trouble has been brewing. It was mighty lucky for you, young man, that you passed your exam for the R.I.B.A. They’ll make you a Fellow if you win through over this job. I wondered why the Building Committee gave you three months’ leave of absence. I helped to wangle that, but I suspected that they might want you out of the way.”

“Why?”

“Because there’s a retired architect on the Committee, bursting with his own misconceptions, a Pecksniff of a fellow. Some of the builders are on the Town Council, all pulling strings. The dice are loaded against you. However, I have dug up a Clerk of the Works, a man I can trust——”

“How can I thank you enough——”

"Tch—tch ! You will have your first fight over him. If they refuse to accept him, bluff the beggars ! Threaten to wash your hands of the job. Bang your hat on your head ! March out ! Then they'll climb down. For the next five months you'll be busy with your detail plans, specifications, quantities, and all that. More ructions. You take an office in the damned town—and stick to it. Don't try to work from London ! You'll have to be meeting your Building Committee regularly—and irregularly, b' Jove ! I can see the artful dodgers waylaying you. You will have your contractor and the sub-contractors raising difficulties and trying to impose upon inexperience. Well, F.B. and I wondered whether you had the guts to fight this crowd to a finish, and I say you have, but we agreed that you ought to be warned. I want you to pull it off alone, but if they smother you, send for me. Let's have a whisky and soda, and jaw about something else."

## III

Michael was not intimidated by the prospect of a fight ; and he was well aware that Font had not exaggerated the obstacles confronting him. He *had* contemplated taking an office in London and perhaps meeting his Building Committee once a fortnight. Font could have done that ; he couldn't. . . .

As soon as he reached the big industrial town, foul with the smoke from a thousand chimneys, he had his first fight, as Font predicted, over the Clerk of the Works. He did bang his hat on his head and threaten to return to London by the next train, and, lo ! the Building Committee apologised profusely—and climbed down. . . .

Three dismal months followed, ninety days of petty warfare and ceaseless vigilance. This was the final test of a man educated by two women. A sprightly public-school-boy, with an assured income of nearly three thousand a year, would have said that such travailings were "not good enough."

He didn't send for Font.

When the spade work was done, just before Christmas, it had been done thoroughly. If he had made enemies, he had made friends who had the wit to recognise ability and honesty when they saw it. A magnate sent for him, and instructed him to draw up plans for a huge country house, a palace of pretension. Michael refused, unless he were given a free hand. That was not accorded. About a week later, the editor of a local newspaper demanded a design for a small house. Small houses were a hobby of Font's. He maintained that people who lived in perfectly proportioned houses acquired a sense of proportion. Michael took a fancy to the editor, and showed him some sketches in water-colour. One was unhesitatingly chosen. Next week the design and floor plan of a modest bungalow were published. This led to unexpected developments. Twenty persons demanded bungalows. . . .

His worship, the Mayor, suggested to Mr. Michael Lynn the expediency of "settling down" in a rich and appreciative community, elevating and directing the public taste. How he would have jumped at such a suggestion when he was slaving away in Font's office! A facile success was his for the taking. He didn't take it. The *wanderlust* was on him. To escape from this dirty, malodorous city, to breathe once more unpolluted air, became an obsession. . . .

He had promised to spend Christmas at Frodsham. As the time approached, he wondered if he could persuade his mother to change her plans. Why not spend Christmas in London? All his Christmases had been spent in the old manor house ever since he was nine years old. Of course, his mother would reply as before that the Christmas Tree for the village children exacted her presence, as lady of the manor.

He decided that he couldn't break his promise.

#### IV

He reached Frodsham late on Christmas Eve. As he passed into the hall, he noticed the usual decorations, the

mistletoe and holly, hung there, so he supposed, by the servants ; he noticed too that the staircase and the corridor above were brilliantly lighted.

" You've put in electricity," he exclaimed.

" Yes—a little surprise."

" It's not a little surprise."

Having hugged Mary and Mitchie, he bent down to warm his hands at the Yule Log. What was left of each Yule Log was carefully preserved till the following Christmas. Then a certain ritual was observed. As children, Primrose and he had harnessed themselves to the new log, gaily decorated with holly and imitation snow, pulled it through the big stone-flagged kitchen into the hall, where Mary laid upon the ancient hearth what was left of the old log. Holes were bored in the new log and filled with tallow. It rested upon a bed of fir cones. After tea, it was lit. When it was fairly ablaze, Mary would sit down and tell stories. . . .

Michael warmed his hands wondering why his mother had imposed what she must know to be poignant memories upon him. And why had she put in electric light ? There was only one possible explanation—she meant to make the old manor house her permanent home.

" I must play up," he thought ; " this is their idea of making things easier for me."

He took off his overcoat, threw it on to a chair, and surveyed Mitchie—

" Well, I'm—blowed ! "

" Thank you," said Mitchie.

" What have you and Mum been up to ? Voronoff or Steinach treatment ? "

" Guess again," said Mitchie.

He was puzzled. But it occurred to him that both these ladies must have resigned themselves to a country life and had entered into a Saint Martin's Summer of contentment. They were beaming at him.

" Do you want to go to your room ? " asked Mary.

" Not yet. I'll have a bath before dinner. I haven't felt really clean for three months. Good Lord ! Mitchie is fidgeting ; I've never seen her fidget before."

Both ladies flushed.

"I must say what's in my mind," continued Michael.  
"Evidently you two have decided to live here."

"We have," said Mary.

"It's—it's a staggerer to me."

Mitchie opened her mouth and closed it ; Mary remained silent. Michael tried to suppress an annoying sense of irritation. Had his mother changed the cherished plans of a lifetime to please *him*? He dared not put that question, because the answer might provoke the lamentable truth that he was not pleased.

"Come upstairs," said Mary. "I have one or two other little surprises that I should like to show you."

She moved to the staircase, followed by Mitchie.

"I can't stand many more surprises," thought Michael.

They passed the length of the corridor till they came to the door of the dressing-room next to Mary's bedroom which Michael had occupied as a boy. At the door, Mary paused, put her finger to her lip, and said in a whisper :

"Tread as softly as possible."

A night-light was burning, but Mary, after a glance at the bed, switched on one of the new lights.

In the bed, fast asleep, with his head resting upon an arm, lay Michael's son.

v

The father advanced ; the two women stepped back, watching him. It was a tremendous moment for them, but they were not sure of what the effect would be on him. Mitchie stole into the passage.

Mary moved nearer to Michael till they stood side by side. She touched his arm, but he was too intent upon the face on the pillow to be aware of her. She wondered if he had noticed anything else : the fresh wallpaper and chintz, the toys lying about, especially the toys. To a quick-witted woman the toys would have told the tale, because toys mean no more to the incurably idiotic than machinery means to a monkey. . . .

He became aware that his mother was standing beside him. In a hoarse voice he whispered :

“ When he awakes——? ”

“ You shall see him awake.”

“ To-morrow ? ”

“ Now. Stand behind the bed, where he can’t see you. Don’t expect too much.”

Michael took up his position as Mary beckoned Mitchie back into the room. To his further surprise, Mary joined him. Evidently it had been arranged that Mitchie should awaken the boy. She sat down on the bed, stretched out her hand, and touched the boy’s cheek, but, in the end, she had to pull down the bedclothes and shake him.

He opened his eyes, blinked, and sat up.

“ Micky——”

The child smiled sleepily at her.

“ Come to me, Micky.”

She spoke in English, with the authority so familiar to the man watching her, in her softest tones. The boy obeyed, still smiling. She took him in her arms and kissed him ; he returned her kisses. A faint exclamation escaped the elder Michael, but Mary gripped his arm, imposing silence.

“ Who am I ? ” asked Mitchie.

He lisped her name, as a baby does. She snatched up a beloved toy lying on the foot of the bed.

“ What is this, Micky ? ”

“ T-t-teddy—b-b-bear.”

The child took the toy from her. Mitchie put him back into bed, tucked him up, and said firmly :

“ Go to sleep again.”

He closed his eyes and fell asleep almost instantly with the toy clasped in his arms.

In the panelled parlour alone with her son Mary asked the first question. Michael had not spoken ; he was unable to speak. He had followed her downstairs, walking like a

man in a dream, conscious only that another thought-racking "revaluation" had taken place. Beside his father's grave, gratitude had come back to him, not swiftly or overwhelmingly, but a gradual percolation. Beside his son's bed, love for a lovely child had crept as slowly into his heart. Much had been taken from him; much had been given to him, and (as before) he felt cheap as dirt——!

"Do you understand why we decorated the house?"

He nodded.

"We did it for you—and the child—and for that other Child who brought joy to the world."

"Mum—what can I say?"

"Say nothing—yet. Sit down and listen to me."

They sat down upon the sofa facing the hearth, where they had sat together so often, when serious things had to be discussed.

"God's ways are not our ways, Michael. Perhaps at this moment you are thinking, if you still believe in God as a God of Love, that this child was sent to you. But men are not dependent upon children, as most women are. It is my conviction that this child was sent to *us*, to you, to me, and perhaps most of all to Mitchie. He has made life worth living to her—and me. I ask you to think of her, of all her disappointments and sufferings. I know now, what she withheld from me for years, how unhappy she was at home with a querulous invalid mother and a clever soured father. She gave them of her best; and she gave her best to you and Primrose. She knew from the first that Prim was a weakling; and it was Mitchie's influence, nothing else, her great gift of imparting character, which made Primrose rise above herself and her too selfish enjoyment of the passing hour. Mitchie understood her far better than we did; Mitchie educated her to be your wife——"

"So she told me."

"Did she tell you that Prim's innocent love for you as a child was the lever which she used to raise her above herself? No. But it was so. After Arthur Wharton's death anything might have happened to such a creature of impulse, but Mitchie's standards prevailed. Try to think

of the Mitchie you have never known—and her disabilities. She was an unattractive child brought up in genteel poverty, in ill health, educated from the first to be a governess, a young girl with a big heart and a big brain in an ugly body. Do you suppose that teaching has been the only passion in her life? She longed for love as every girl does. It was never given to her. She told me that when she first began teaching she suppressed love for her pupils, because she knew that there would be an endless procession of them, drifting in and out of her life. . . . She came here. . . . Prim and you were too much for her. . . . I was amazed that she was able to inspire love in you two. . . . The love innate in her called to you. . . . Then I partially understood. . . . She became my best friend. . . . The War came, dislocating every plan. . . . It upset both of us terribly; I held on to her; she held on to me. After the War, up to the time of your marriage, both of us were slowly losing our interest in life. . . . We were tired. . . . Your marriage revitalised us. . . . We told each other that we should live again in your children. . . . Then we were all smitten to the dust. You went to South Africa. I went to Quimper with Mitchie. We brought Michel to England, and placed him in the hands of Sir Dunstan Tarrant. He has worked the miracle. Humanly speaking, the child will be perfectly normal in a few years. Mitchie told me to tell you that in her opinion he will not be the least of the Lynns——”

“ I—I understand that message.”

“ Perhaps you understand too what this boy means to Mitchie and me.”

“ I do.”

“ Can you kneel down with me, my son, and thank God, humbly and gratefully, for what he has sent to us this Christmas ? ”

They knelt down together.

## VII

To-day, Michael is hard at work, not in the north, not in London, but at Frodsham. He began what is likely to be

his life's work with the restoration of the old manor ; when his designs for that were finished, he undertook, at Font's request, designs for small houses. He will never build a cathedral or a palace, but what he saw dimly when he stood on the *parvis* at Mont Saint-Michel, and looked up at the Abbey Church, informs all his designs—solid craftsmanship, endurance, love of beauty. . . .

Mitchie says, with a tincture of her old defiance, that young Micky, who (according to her) displays extraordinary intelligence in his manipulation of toy bricks, will build a monument, some day, that may perpetuate the name of Lynn.

THE END





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